

# **Explaining Influences on Career ‘Choice’ in Comparative Perspective**

by

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\* Correspond with: Mustafa Özbilgin, [m.ozbilgin@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:m.ozbilgin@qmul.ac.uk) Data for this project were collected as a part of a more extensive cross-national study, organized with a democratic principle in which all participants are allowed to publish the findings of the research by noting contributions and authorship. We would like to acknowledge the efforts of colleagues from different countries in conducting the questionnaire, inputting data and offering their suggestions for improving the methods, style and content of the questionnaire as well as our coding strategy. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the American Psychological Association (APA) Conference in Honolulu, 1-6 August 2004. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the conference participants and also wish to express our appreciation for the contribution of Professor Geraldine Healy to the design of the career ‘choice’ measure. We would also like to express our gratitude to the organisers and sponsors of the International Visiting Fellow Programme at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University for facilitating our research on this paper.

## **Explaining Influences on Career ‘Choice’: the case of MBA students**

### **Abstract**

This study explores the influences on career choices of the MBA students from three countries at micro-individual, meso-institutional and relational and macro-structural levels, questioning the apparent dominance of ‘free choice’ in the context of persistent forms of structural constraints in career markets. The paper takes a critical perspective on career ‘choice’, acknowledging the contested nature of ‘choice’ and identifying career as a product of socially and historically situated choices which are negotiated through structural constraints. The central hypothesis of the study is that ‘it is more likely for the MBA students to report micro-agentic or meso-institutional and relational rather than macro-structural conditions as key influences on their career choices’. The study draws on the findings of a cross-national survey involving Britain, Israel, and Turkey, using the career choice dimensions designed by Özbilgin and Healy (2003). Findings show that MBA students consider the impact of structural conditions as less significant on their career choices than their own human capital and capacity to make free choices. The study provides an understanding of the main cross-national diversities and similarities in reporting of influences on career ‘choice’, and brings to bare interesting theoretical and methodological insights.

### **Introduction**

Career ‘choice’ is a subject which has attracted academic, professional as well as public attention, due to its multifaceted nature. Since career is a result of the interplay between individuals within organisational and social structures, it yields well to analysis from diverse perspectives ranging from occupational psychology to organizational sociology. Research on career choice is not uncommon on occupational groups such as accountants and health care professionals (see Morrison 2004, Hallissey et al. 2000, Kyriacou and Colthart 2000). The aim of such research is often to predict career choice behaviours based on personality as well as demographic distributive factors.

The research project, which is reported here, diverges from those traditional studies that seek to provide blueprints for better career counselling. This study is different in the sense that it does not serve the purposes of predicting career choice behaviour. It rather sets out to examine the factors that reportedly influence career choice for MBA students in three countries: Britain, Israel and Turkey. Drawing on both mainstream and heterodox literature, the paper introduces the notion of career ‘choice’ and explores how the career choice literature has evolved and identifies a unique and layered method of evaluating reported influences on career ‘choice’. The methods of the study are presented and the results are explored in context. The paper discusses implications and conclusions of the study based on the survey findings. The aim of this paper is to examine the reported influences on career choices of MBA students from three different countries from a layered perspective, involving micro-individual and agentic, meso-institutional and relational, and macro-structural levels of analysis.

## **Theoretical Background and Hypothesis**

### ***The Concept of Career ‘Choice’***

Career ‘choice’ is a complex phenomenon which can be better appreciated through a study of its key components, i.e. career and choice. Dating back to the seminal works of Hughes (1937) and Goffman (1968), career has been the focus of many studies. However, the contemporary formulations of the concept by critical realists embody a layered conception that embraces subjective experiences and objective structures of work in interplay (Layder 1993). The dictionary definition of choice is ‘the voluntary act of selecting or separating from two or more things that which is preferred; and the determination of the mind in preferring one thing to another’ (Webster’s Dictionary 1998). The definition incorporates two components: First is the *availability of alternatives*, which presents an objective reality, and the second one, the act of *preference*, which involves a subjective process. If a reference to career ‘choice’ is made, availability of career choices and the dynamics of choosing a career should be examined. Hence, in order for career choice to take place, there should be alternative career routes available and there should be an individual preference between these career options. In the context of evidence of rigidities of supply and demand in career markets, persistence of structural and institutionalised forms of discrimination in employment, as well as path dependence by education and experience in many fields of career deem career ‘choice’ a highly contestable phenomenon. The constrained and variable nature of available career routes in real life makes career ‘choice’ in its pure form, i.e. a free and unconstrained career choice based on individual will, a rare commodity, a naïve expectation or even a misguided belief. Therefore, the term ‘choice’ is presented in this paper in quotation marks.

### ***Overview of the Career ‘Choice’ Literature***

This section first briefly reviews the theoretical contributions that provide an understanding of career ‘choices’ of MBA students from micro, meso and macro levels of analysis, drawing on various corresponding conceptual frameworks. Then all hypotheses developed and tested are described. The paper offers a description of its key hypotheses, linking it to these theoretical developments.

### ***Dualisms of the Career ‘Choice’ Literature: Agency & Structure and Push & Pull Perspectives***

The basic definitions stated above embody the two highly polarized considerations on career ‘choice’: One consideration is that of individual agency in career choice. Individual agency includes dispositions, human capital, attitudes and personality, which act as moderators of career choice. Marshall (1989) stated that agency approach expresses independence through self-assertion and control over the environment. Agentic career choice seeks control, certainty and predictability. In other words agency asserts itself in focused, direct action to alter or control environment. The second consideration is that of opportunity structures and constraints that make available and limit career choice. “Contextual affordance” and “opportunity structures” are important constructs, through which the effects of the environments on the choice process can be studied. These constructs focus on the resources or hardships that are embedded in the individual career context (Lent & Brown, 1996). Studies in career literature characteristically examine career choice from either one of these considerations (e.g., Johnes, 1999; Hallissey et al, 2000), or from a mixed agency and structure framework where the contextual influences are viewed as antecedents or mediating factors of career ‘choice’ (e.g., Slater, 1980; Kyriacou and Coulthard

2000; Kyriacou et al. 2002). The dualism of human agency and social structure marks the contested ground of both career choice (Roberts, 1977)

Traditional theories of career choice are criticized as accepting agentic masculine career behavior as normative (Marshall, 1989). Another criticism to agentic career approach comes from Mignot (2000), arguing that theories that emphasize the power of individual agency are insufficient to explain the role of structural and cultural factors in shaping individual career choice behavior in a systematic way. Mignot (2000) believes that it is necessary to revision and re-theorise how contemporary careers are constructed by individuals and to gain a critical appreciation of how these constructions relate to social systems and structures. Social structure is not seen as an entity external to the individual, rather individuals are regarded as active agents who both construct and are constrained by their social world. This approach that can be seen as a major challenge to traditional scholarly approaches as it offers a new understanding of the context of career that emphasizes the tensions between individual and context, objective and subjective career, have now largely come together (Mignot, 2000). As it was emphasized by social cognitive career theory (SCCT), we need a conception that takes the importance of personal agency and explain how internal and external factors serve to enhance or constrain agency in the career decision-making process (Albert and Luzzo, 1999).

Although, the findings of the studies mentioned above are congruent with the argument that individual agency cannot be considered in isolation from contextual factors and that there is an interplay between the two in shaping career 'choices', nevertheless, the researchers continue to draw causal relationships of unidirectional and linear fashion between the influence of agency and structure in shaping career 'choice'. For example, Johnes' (1999) examination of the 1991 US National Household Education Survey reveals that expected earnings, fertility and schooling of women have an impact on their career 'choices'. In the study a direct relationship was also noted between individual choice and availability and nature of opportunity structures. Another piece of research that emphasizes the role of agency and ignores structural considerations would be Hallissey et al.'s (2000) study which examined 150 undergraduate students' motivations for choosing careers in dentistry in Ireland. Their research identifies that while some students emphasized the service aspects of dentistry others were motivated with career processes and outcomes. The authors also compare their findings with students from Israel, Australia, South Africa, USA and the UK and note that in comparison to their Irish counterparts, the service element was less pronounced as a motivational factor between students from other countries. Another example of research, which combines structure and agency considerations, is Slater's research on librarians and information professionals. Slater (1980, p. 178) identifies an entry motivation scale, which ranges from agentic to structural considerations, including factors such as (a) vocation (deliberate and involved entry), (b) family tradition, (c) careerist or 'sensible' reasons, (d) delaying move, 'buying time to think', (e) weak motivation but own decision, (f) guided by others' advice, (g) unplanned, accidental chance and refugee syndrome. These seven factors are later grouped by the same author as individual decision-making and external influences. Similarly, studying 298 undergraduate student's career choices in teaching in England, Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) used a 20 factor scale which includes a range of job attributes and job-person fit as proxy for factors which influence career choice. In a later study, Kyriacou et al. (2002) examine a sample of 84 Norwegian students' views on a career in teaching. Their study reveals that students' career choices are informed by the availability of career opportunities and paths. Similarly, Özkale *et al.* (2004) examined a sample of 386 undergraduate Turkish students in order to identify the factors influencing engineering 'choice' and they revealed three factors: i) interest in engineering, ii) desire to become a leader iii) scores achieved in university entrance exam. They found significant differences by gender. While women students have drawn their influence from acquaintances and family of both genders, it

was clear that male students were mostly influenced by women. Another important result was the influence of relatives on the students' engineering choice both on female and male students, the influence being stronger for the former. This pattern is verified also in some other countries (Brainard and Carlin, 1998).

As exemplified above, earlier works on career 'choice' have examined it often through dualistic analytical frameworks such as 'pull' and 'push' factors, or typologies such as of career, service, instrumental, individual and group orientations, or in terms of job-person fit at individual, intermediate-organisational and at macro labour market levels. The studies which use structure and agency and 'push' and 'pull' factors as a framework for examining career choice focus on the choice of self-employment over other forms of employment. This framework has been dominant particularly in the literature on motives for setting up small and medium enterprises. For example, Shapero (1971) identified four factors that influence the choice of business entry. These are external 'push' factors such as redundancy or forced migration; and three 'pull' factors: individual attitudes, belief and general psychological make-up; the social becoming and status; and the access to various relevant resources. Bates (1999), Borooah and Hart (1999) and Clark and Drinkwater (2000) refer to complex mechanisms of 'push' and 'pull' for choosing self-employment as a career. More specific research on minority ethnic employment has also adopted 'push' and 'pull' frameworks: Studies by Boissevain (1984) and Barrett *et al.* (1996), for example, have both tried to explain the main reasons for the 'choice' of self-employment between minority ethnic people through 'pull' and 'push' factors. However the main concern over this approach is its bluntness as an analytical instrument for reflecting the truly complex nature of such choice. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) critique the use of 'push' and 'pull' as an analytical framework, contending that 'social agents are not `particles` that are mechanically pushed and pulled by external forces. They are rather bearers of capitals, and depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 108-109).

### *Moving from Dualisms to Micro, Meso and Macro Influences on Career 'Choice'*

In order to explore career 'choice' as an outcome of the complex interplay of agency and structure, we propose a three-pronged approach, allowing for a layered study of influences on career 'choice' from micro, meso and macro-levels, as inspired by the contributions of Layder (1993) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992). At the micro level of the self, there are factors such as individual agency, dispositions and different forms of capital, as key influences on individual choice. The meso level involves the habitus or the processes which mediate and negotiate career choices in the light of individual desires, capital and contextual circumstances. At the macro level, the study examines structural conditions that inhibit or enhance career choice. The inclusion of micro, meso and macro levels of analysis allows for a reading of individual career 'choice' as a negotiated process which is socially and historically situated. Such a layered analysis allows the researcher to see social reality and its many interwoven relationships in their broader complexity. The multifaceted and layered approach to the study of phenomenon, such as careers, is unique to the realist tradition (Layder 1993). This paper seeks to draw our attention to this tradition, particularly to the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu, a French educational sociologist, posthumously acknowledging his legacy.

One of the key considerations of sociology is the nature of the interplay between agency and structure, namely the relationship between individual motives, aspirations, capital and the

structural circumstances in which the former are situated. The realist treatment of agency and structure suggests a relationship of layered interplay, where individual agency is enacted and negotiated through structural circumstances in a dynamic process that in turn moderates both individual agency and structures.

In his efforts to approximate social reality, Bourdieu (1998) has proposed various conceptual tools. He used the concepts of capital and dispositions at micro level, habitus at meso level and the field at macro level of analysis in order to operationalise his realist project of social research (Jenkins 1992). This study explored career choice as a construct and process which is influenced by engagement at each of these three levels. The first concept that resides at the micro-individual level of analysis is the capital. Bourdieu (1986), breaking with the homologous tradition of human capital theorists such as Becker (1967), identified various forms of capital (i.e. economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital) that individuals draw on in order to pursue their career choices (Bourdieu 1998: p.47).

Bourdieu's (1977) conception of 'dispositions' is useful in understanding individual choice of careers, as it embraces both habitual and cognitive elements. This conception takes support from social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Lent and Brown (1996, p. 315) summarised SCCT's assumption in the following way:

"The social cognitive variables do not operate alone in shaping vocational interest, choice, and performance. Indeed, these variables are affected by, and function in concert with, other important qualities of persons and their contexts, such as gender, race and ethnicity, genetic endowment, and socioeconomic status. Although race and sex are often thought of as physical aspects of persons, SCCT is more concerned with their psychological and social effects. Their primary relevance to career development is seen as linked to the sort of reactions they evoke from the social-cultural environment, as well as from their relation to the opportunity structure that pervades career development. Thus, race and sex may be viewed as statuses that are socially conferred and constructed, transcending their mere biological properties."

The meso level of analysis that Bourdieu proposes can be understood through an exploration of his concept of *habitus*. Bourdieu (1990) defines habitus as 'A system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them' (p. 53).

Bourdieu (1998) qualifies this definition with an example: 'Habitus are generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices – what the worker eats, and especially the way he eats it, the sport he practice and the way he practices it, his political opinions and the way he expresses them are systematically different from the industrial owner's corresponding activities. But habitus are also classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes. They make distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so forth. But, the distinctions are not identical. Thus, for instance, the same behaviour or even the same good can appear distinguished to one person, pretentious to someone else, or cheap or showy to yet another (p. 8)'.

At the macro level of resides the considerations of structural and institutional conditions that manifest themselves as different forms of discrimination and disadvantage, path dependencies, and

career trajectories, boundaries and rigidities. Combining these three levels of analysis is required for a deeper understanding of influences on career choice. Özbilgin and Healy (2004) in their study of academic careers in Turkey allude to the dialectical relationship between self and circumstances through which the aspirations, processes and outcomes of both subjective and objective aspects of individual careers can be studied. Similarly, Sluis and Poell's (2002) work reveals that the learning behaviour of MBA students in their early careers is interrelated with their learning opportunities. The interplay of self and circumstances is confirmed in their research. Making sense of career choice requires an examination of the interwoven nature of the relationship between subjective reality of careers, such as the individual career experience, and objective reality of structural conditions, such as the structures of opportunity and constraint, as residing in the field.

Studies on ethnicity, gender and disability have also signalled the relevance of the treatment of structure and agency from a layered perspective. Seeking to demystify the Chinese 'success' story in Britain, particularly as narrated in labour market studies conducted by Modood (1997) and others, Pang and Lau (1998) argue that the situation is more complex than is reflected in statistical analysis of labour market profile of Chinese minority in the UK. Chinese minority in Britain has been heralded as the most successful minority population in terms of earnings, surpassing the earnings of the majority white ethnic British population. Pang and Lau (1998), however, caution that this interpretation provides only a partial account as Chinese minority's career choices are still socially and culturally constrained as they are largely employed in the ethnic niche of catering sector. They highlight the significance of individual and collective drive as well as social will to change as a precursor for increasing the choice of career alternatives for this community. Another example of demonstrating the layered nature of career choice is evident in a study of disability and careers. To date, the research attention to disability and careers has been scant. There is, however, empirical evidence to suggest that disability discrimination, in terms of access to jobs, is rife in both public and private sector employment. There are further layers of discrimination than can be observed through employment rates. Hirst's study (1987) of 274 young people with disabilities revealed that the occupational choice for this group is constrained due to various forms of disadvantage. Their occupational roles are undervalued and segregated from able-bodied workers. They live on poverty line and do not enjoy decent living conditions, which subsequently create a vicious cycle which in turn severely inhibits their career 'choices'.

There are other examples of research that reflect the layered nature of career 'choice' and constraint that we seek to demonstrate here. It is well documented that female students are under-represented in science, engineering and technology education in the British university system. Whilst there is a tendency to interpret such skewed representations through a discourse of 'barriers on women's way', Siann and Callaghan (2001) argue that occupational choice is a more complex matter and that structural factors alone cannot fully account for this outcome. They demonstrate that such research ignores the positive and informed choices that women make after considering the contextual issues such as employability and occupational status. In the same way, it is our contention that we need approximate social reality through careful and rigorous juxtaposition of various layers of understanding and insight from micro, meso and macro levels.

### ***MBA Students' Career 'Choices'***

Moving on to the subject of our study, the factors that influence MBA students' career 'choices' requires us to explore particular issues pertaining to MBA study and the significance of studying career 'choice' between MBA students. If we consider that MBA has a history of barely two decades, the global popularity of MBA study is of unprecedented nature with over 100 thousand people internationally studying for an MBA degree each year (Sturges et al. 2003). Motivations for undertaking an MBA study as well as its processes and key outcomes are well studied in the Western

European and North American context. For example, in his comparative study of a sample of managers with MBAs and with other Masters degrees in the USA, Shipper (1999) revealed that MBA does not provide a competitive advantage in terms of management skills over other Masters degree programmes. Nevertheless, Sturges et al. (2003) identified that one of the key competencies that MBA provides is an awareness of career meanings, motivations, skills, knowledge and confidence and these could translate into other competencies at work. In the context of growing 'managerialism' (Enteman 1993), these competencies may work as career enhancing attributes. Furthermore, studying for an MBA has many individual benefits: it may improve one's human capital, and enhance their career prospects and employability, it may be used as a vehicle to negotiate an accelerated route to career advancement (Baruch and Peiperl 2000), build their self confidence (Sturges et al. 2003), it may also facilitate career change.

However, reporting on a study of 221 MBA graduates in the UK, Simpson (2000) argues that the career outcomes of an MBA degree are more complex when explored along the gender divide. Her research identifies that although women achieve intrinsic success, such as improved confidence, through an MBA study, men are rewarded with more pay and better occupational status and that there are still gendered barriers to graduate women's career success. In their longitudinal study stretching over 13 years, Reitman and Schneer (2003) have identified that MBA graduates enjoy both self-managed (protean) and promised (traditional career with intra-institutional career advancement phases) career trajectories. Although the protean career stands only at 30 per cent of overall career choices, it nevertheless provides a new alternative route for MBA students. They also note that women MBAs enjoy fewer gender barriers in protean career paths in comparison to traditional career paths. This provides an interesting comparison with Simpson's (2000) work, which suggest that gendered barriers to career success are also evident for graduate women.

Furthermore, the Association of MBAs' research (2000) on MBA careers and pay in the UK has highlighted that despite their favourable conditions of pay, MBA graduates suffer from long working hours and display associated stress symptoms. Although previous studies have examined the complex career outcomes for MBA graduates, the role of education, in general, in career change has been largely ignored in earlier research (Rhodes and Doering 1983). Despite a growing body of often polarized evidence on skills and competencies associated with an MBA study, or career outcomes for MBA graduates, career choice of MBA students have attracted scant attention.

Even less attention was paid to the influences on career 'choices' of MBA students. MBA study offers a suitable interval in which main influences on career 'choice' can be examined. There are three main reasons for this proposition. First, an MBA study often precedes career entry, enhancement, advancement, or career change. It involves a period of time in which significant career choices are made, pursued and negotiated. Secondly, an MBA is commonly offered as a postgraduate 'conversion' course for graduate students with a wide spectrum of educational and professional backgrounds often outside the business and management discipline. Therefore, MBA as a programme of study itself offers an opportunity for students to consider business, organizations, management and careers in context. Thirdly, the MBA study has an ideological legacy of promoting management to professional status, offering its graduates a faster route to managerial careers. This final characteristic of the MBA study places it at the core of the neo-liberal ideology with its strong belief in rational and unconstrained choices in unregulated markets and its inattention to structural constraints. These three reasons make MBA students an interesting group in which to study career choice. Furthermore, the final reason above informs the development of the central hypothesis of our paper. Because of the dominance of the belief in agentic power, meritocracy and a general lack of awareness of structural constraints, as explained



in the above literature overview, the following hypothesis was developed and tested: *It is more likely for the MBA students to report micro-agentic, and meso-relational and institutional influences rather than macro-structural conditions as key influences on their career 'choices'.*

## **Empirical Research**

This section of the paper aims to draw on the findings of a cross-national survey involving UK, Israel and Turkey. First, we explain how the survey instrument has been developed by focusing on research design and data collection process. Also, we explain how we derived the statements that are used in the career 'choice' measure. Then the results of the first descriptive factor analysis and multivariate and univariate analyses are summarized. The study provides an understanding of the main cross-national diversity and similarities in reporting of influences on career 'choice', and brings to bare interesting theoretical and methodological insights.

### ***Overview of the Cross-Cultural Contexts of the Research***

This paper draws on a layered and multifaceted approach (Layder 1993) in exploring the factors that influence the MBA students' career 'choice' in different countries to understand the main cross-national diversities and similarities. Layder's method (1993) involves three levels of analysis. At the micro level, there are the micro-individual influences on career choice. The intermediate-organizational level is studied through an assessment of intutional contexts and relational constructs. At the macro level, there is examination of structural considerations. The layered phenomenon described here was explored using data generated through the questionnaire surveys in three countries; Britain, Israel and Turkey, which present a very interesting and diverse ensemble of national cultures, educational systems, labour markets and trajectories of social, political and economic history.

It is a common assumption that social and cultural environment influences career choice, therefore an understanding of the main cross-national diversities and similarities of influences on career 'choice' brings interesting theoretical and methodological insights. In career choice literature, theory and research based largeley in North American counseling psychology, by contrast, British contribution to this area has had a stronger sociological influence (Collin, 1998). Flores and Heppner (2002) cited Gysbers and his colleagues (1998) views of the influence of Western European beliefs in career theory, research and practices as follows: a) individualism and autonomy, b) affluence, c) an open opportunity structure to all, d) central importance of work in peoples lives, and e) a linear, progressive, and rational career development process. Flores and Heppner emphasized that recent research and practice demonstrate that these tenets may no longer be accurate reflections of the present vocational world and its inhabitants.

Cross-national studies are educational as they can reveal the layered as well as socially and culturally constructed nature of career 'choice'. For example, an earlier comparative study on banking sector in Britain and Turkey (Özbilgin and Woodward 2003) uncovered that career 'choices' are subject to different processes of social construction and gendering in Britain and Turkey and that an understanding of these processes require an evaluation of contextual components of labour market, organization in an interplay with individual beliefs, culture, capital and aspirations. The study exposes the historically situated and gendered nature of occupational choice, in clear contrast to biologically deterministic, or overtly structuralist or agentic explanations for the gendered nature of career choice. In their study of career advancement in the USA and Japan, Ishida *et al.* (2002) note

that although the same selection process is evident in both countries, the practice of career advancement displays variance due to contextual factors such as labour market processes and industrial culture and recipes. The complexity of cross-national study of careers is that of identifying divergence in apparently similar contexts of countries under scrutiny.

When we take the relations between careers and cultures into account, Price (1997) stated that in individualist cultures, individuals are looking for individual advantage and career progression, autonomy and individual financial security. Individualist cultures value personal success, responsibility and self respect. On the contrary, in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, which is a dimension of collectivist culture, people seek greater career stability Price also cited Triandis's (1995) finding that the key difference of individualist culture is a tendency to emphasize ability and to underemphasize effort, but the reverse is true in collectivist culture.

In this part of the study some short information about three countries where data collected are given in order to lead us to question the usefulness of relational and comparative analysis. It is important to note that individualism and collectivism dimensions in these countries may have underpin some of the cross-national variations in terms of reported influences on career 'choice' experiences of the survey respondents.

Britain is high in individualism, low in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, medium in masculinity, low in work centrality and high in job satisfaction (Price, 1997). Britain is identified in the Anglo cluster in cultural studies (Ronen and Shenker, 1985). Anglo culture has similar characteristics with individualist one. In Anglo culture special emphasis is given to individual success. Nowadays, like many advanced economies, the UK has an ageing population. Employees in UK work longer hours per week than employees in other EU countries. Household form is changing in the sense that 53 per cent have all members working household, while, at the other side, 17 per cent of the households have no one working (Richbell, 2001) Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the British respondents may define their key career influences more independently and through an individualist frame of reference than through a socially interdependent and collectivist frame of reference.

Israel is medium in individualism, high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, medium in masculinity, medium in work centrality and high in job satisfaction (Price, 1997). In country cluster Israel is reportedly independent from other countries. Independents appear in different clusters in different research and more research is needed to place them in a specific cluster (Ronen and Shenker, 1985). In recent years, Israeli society has changed from being ascetic, collectivistic, closed, and relatively homogeneous, to a materialistic, individualistic, open, and pluralistic society. Israel is experiencing a change towards pluralism and heterogeneity in its social and cultural profile. Israeli society has also shifted from the kibbutz ethic to the high-tech spirit. People in Israel consider work as means for the individual's self-satisfaction and achievement of personal goals, instead of regarding work as a responsibility for family or a contribution to society. Career development is one of the values that workers now place greater importance (Sagie and Weisberg, 2001)

Turkey is low in individualism, high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, and medium in masculinity (Price, 1997). In country cluster study Turkey was near eastern that has similar characteristics with collectivist countries (Ronen and Shenker, 1985). Since Hofstede's research, the socio-cultural environment in Turkey has changed. In recent studies (e.g. Aycan, 2001) Turkey was found highly paternalistic, moderately collectivistic and hierarchical, and non-fatalistic. In terms of internal work culture, managers held favorable assumptions and beliefs

regarding employee malleability, responsibility seeking and participation. On the other hand, it was a common belief that employees were not proactive. Turkish societal and organizational culture can be defined as a blend of "Western" and "Eastern" values. Turkey has a young and educated human capital. More than half of Turkey's population (57 per cent) is comprised of people under the age of 30. Turkey also has a very young managerial population (mean age is 27.6). (Aycan, 2001).

In brief, the divergent nature of social structures and historical paths of economic and political development in those national contexts deems this study complex, leading us to question the usefulness of relational and comparative analysis.

### ***Survey Development***

This study is based on a cross-national questionnaire survey<sup>1</sup>. The study examined 20 different influences on career 'choice'. These influences are identified through a literature review, which is presented in the earlier sections, and listed in Table 1. The table provides the main influences on career 'choice' and the academic sources from which these influences are collated. Each item was assessed on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (valued at 1) to 'strongly agree' (valued at 7). Item one in the list relates to pure agentic choice. Items two to seven survey different forms of capital that influence choice as identified by Bourdieu. Items eight and nine are expressions of habitus. Items ten to 16 are about dispositions as well as the field, the interplay between agency and structure as they reflect agentic choice in the context of structural constraints and opportunities. Items 17-20 explore structural constraints or discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to address emergent issues pertaining to cross-national application of the survey tool, an internet based work group through which the country coordinators were able to exchange ideas and discuss problems was created. The forum benefits from an archive of email discussions as well as an archive of files included questionnaire documents in various languages, data sets from all participating countries, notes for coding and analysis of data.

**Table 1: Influences on career choice: survey items and their academic sources**

Item number	Career influences	Source
<i>Micro Level Influences: Agentic concerns</i>		
1	Have a free choice in making own career decisions	Slater 1980; Hakim 1991 and 1996; Bourdieu 1998
2	Own education and training	Hakim 1991, 1996; Bourdieu 1998; Sturges et al. 2003; Rhodes and Doering 1983
3	Own skills, competences and abilities	Baruch and Peiperl 2003; Schein 1978 and 1985; Bourdieu 1998
4	Own acquaintances, friends and/or family	Slater 1980; Bourdieu 1998
5	Own knowledge of labour and/or career market	Schein 1978, 1985; Baruch 2004; Bourdieu 1998
6	Own financial and economic condition	Bourdieu 1998
7	Career choices are/were influenced by own background	Slater 1980; Bourdieu 1998
<i>Meso Level Influences: institutional and relational contexts</i>		
8	Ease of access to own career of choice	Shapero 1971; Bates 1999; Borooah and Hart 1999; Kyracou and Coulthart 2000; Clark and Drinkwater 2000; Barrett et al. 1996; Slater 1980
9	Lack of access to other of career options	Shapero 1971; Bates 1999; Borooah and Hart 1999; Kyracou and Coulthart 2000; Clark and Drinkwater 2000; Barrett et al. 1996; Slater 1980
10	Quality of life associated with own career of choice	Hallissey et al 2000; Baruch 2004
11	Flexibility associated with the own career of choice	Hallissey et al 2000
12	Autonomy associated with the own career of choice	Hallissey et al 2000
13	Development opportunities associated with the own career of choice	Hallissey et al 2000; Schein 1985
14	Promotion opportunities associated with the own career of choice	Hallissey et al 2000
15	Training and education opportunities in the own career of choice	Hallissey et al 2000
16	Superior financial rewards in the own career of choice	Hallissey et al 2000
<i>Macro Level Influences: structural conditions</i>		
17	Career choices are/were influenced by own sex	Simpson 2000; Procter and Padfield 1999; Slater 1980
18	Career choices are/were influenced by own ethnicity	Özbilgin 1998; Slater 1980
19	Career choices are/were influenced by own age	Özbilgin 1998; Slater 1980
20	Chance, luck and/or faith	Wiseman 2004; Baruch 2004

In a similar study, Auyeung and Sands' study (1997) which explored the career choice factors for Australian, Hong Kong and Taiwanese students along the dimensions of individualism and collectivism identified and tested 12 items. They categorised the influences on career choice in three broad groups of significant others, materials (those factors that relate to opportunity structures and constraints), and beliefs. Although there is an overlap with the influences listed in our study, our study was based on a different epistemological approach, examining the influences from micro, meso and macro levels, drawing on different forms of capital, 'free choice', career outcomes and structural constraints.

The questionnaire form was created firstly in English language, then it was translated to Hebrew and Turkish. The translated versions were later back translated and amended in order to ensure equivalence of meaning across translations (Sekaran, 1983).

### *Characteristics of the Sample*

The study generated 259 completed questionnaires from three countries (Britain<sup>2</sup>, Israel<sup>3</sup> and Turkey<sup>4</sup>). The study collected the following demographic data: the nationality of participants, their sex, age, job experience, their occupation, career goal, marital status, and source of funding for the MBA study. These demographic statistics are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2. Sample Characteristics**

Variables	British N (%)	Israel N (%)	Turkish N (%)	Total N (%)
	39 (15,1)	100 (38,6)	120 (46,3)	259 (100,0)

#### *Sex*

- Male	22 (56,4)	41 (41,0)	69 (57,5)	132 (51,0)
- Female	17 (43,6)	59 (59,0)	51 (42,5)	127 (49,0)

#### *Age*

- Under 26	9 (23,1)	12 (12,0)	81 (67,5)	102 (28,0)
- 26-30	5 (12,8)	41 (41,0)	28 (23,3)	74 (39,4)
- 31-35	8 (20,5)	19 (19,0)	6 (5,0)	33 (28,6)
- 36 +	17 (43,6)	28 (28,0)	5 (4,2)	50 (12,7)

#### *Occupation (72)\**

- Technical area	12 (41,4)	20 (45,5)	58 (50,9)	90 (48,1)
- Social area	17 (58,6)	24 (54,5)	40 (35,1)	81 (43,3)
- Other	-	-	16 (14,0)	16 (8,6)

#### *Job experience (40)\**

- Inexperienced	5 (13,2)	-	50 (42,0)	55 (25,1)
- Experienced	33 (86,8)	62 (100,0)	69 (58,0)	164 (74,9)

#### *Career Goal (110)\**

- Having own business	1 (3,6)	10 (26,3)	4 (4,8)	15 (10,1)
- Advancement	27 (96,4)	28 (73,7)	79 (95,2)	134 (89,9)

#### *Marital Status (3)\**

- Single	19 (50,0)	35 (35,4)	103 (86,6)	157 (61,3)
- Married	19 (50,0)	64 (64,6)	16 (13,4)	99 (38,7)

#### *Funding for MBA Study (2)\**

- Self	12 (30,8)	65 (65,7)	51 (42,9)	128 (49,8)
- Parents	2 (5,1)	23 (23,2)	64 (53,8)	89 (34,6)
- Employer	25 (64,1)	11 (11,1)	4 (3,4)	40 (15,6)

\* Missing cases

<sup>2</sup> The British sample consisted of 39 MBA students from two universities.

<sup>3</sup> The Israel sample consisted of 100 MBA students from two universities.

<sup>4</sup> The Turkish sample consisted of 120 MBA students from four different public universities.

Significant cross-national differences are noted in the Table 2. It is interesting to note that there were significant cross-national variations in all distributive statistics. This is an indication of the diversity of the range of students that MBA programmes attract. Except for the Israeli sample, the proportion of male MBA students was higher than the proportion of female MBA students (Pearson Chi-Square= 6,487;  $p=0,039$ ). In terms of age, the British sample had an older average age, while Israel and Turkey had younger MBA respondents (Pearson Chi-Square= 96,350;  $p=0,000$ ). This is congruent with the ageing population in Britain and relatively low national average age in Turkey and also in Israel. Although the age composition may partly be explained through average age of the national population in each country, the size of tuition fees, requirements for several years of work experience and availability of institutional funding in Britain, and factors such as regulations regarding military conscription as well as the demand for qualifications in the labour markets in Turkey and Israel contribute to the divergence of age distribution of MBA students in these countries. The questionnaire also obtained distributive data on occupation of respondents. Whilst half of the students in Turkey came from technical occupations there were proportionately less respondents from technical occupational backgrounds in Israel and Britain, in descending order (Pearson Chi-Square= 15,395;  $p=0,004$ ). All respondents from Israel had previous work experience. However, 13 and 25 percent of the respondents in Britain and Turkey lacked work experience (Pearson Chi-Square= 41,759;  $p=0,000$ ). Whilst only one respondent in Britain cited setting up own business as a career goal, 26 percent of the respondents in Israel and 5 percent in Turkey expressed such interest. The rest of the respondents aspired for intra-organisational career advancement (Pearson Chi-Square= 14,911;  $p=0,001$ ). 64 percent of the Israeli and half of the British respondents were married. The proportion of married respondents was lower in Turkey (Pearson Chi-Square= 62,150;  $p=0,000$ ). MBA study was predominantly supported by institutional funds in Britain where MBA is one of the most expensive higher education degrees. Whilst parents appear to be the key source of funding for Turkish respondents, Israeli respondents predominantly relied on self-funding (Pearson Chi-Square= 106,786;  $p=0,000$ ).

### ***Results of the Multivariate and Univariate Tests for Micro, Meso and Macro Level Variables on Career 'Choice'***

The data related to micro, meso and macro level variables was analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The categorical independent variable of analysis was "nationality" and consisted of British, Israel and Turkish. The dependent variables were the "micro, meso and macro influences on career 'choice'" stated in Table 1. To understand the underlying contributions of the variables to the significant multivariate effect, it was proceeded to test each dependent variable using one-way ANOVAs with the three groups. In subsequent analyses, the categorical variable was modified to allow all direct comparisons of British and Israel, British and Turkish, and Israel and Turkish. In other words, post hoc multiple comparisons were made to determine the significance differences for observed means among the nationalities.

The analysis of MANOVA compensates for variable intercorrelation and provides an omnibus test of any multivariate effect. However, given the large differences in the sizes of the three nationality groups (British: 39, Israel: 100, and Turkish: 120) it was necessary to test for unequal variances among the three groups (Hair et al., 1998). Therefore, in all procedure, Box's M test for homogeneity of dispersion matrices was produced in order to understand the appropriateness of the use of the MANOVA in the analysis. All relations was tested at  $p < 0.05$ .

#### ***Micro Level: Individual 'Choice' – Agentic Influences***

As stated earlier, a MANOVA was calculated for the micro level dependent variables with the independent variable of nationality. The overall Hotelling's Trace was significant at  $F=10,354$  ( $p=0.000$ ). Table 3 provides these results.

**Table 3: Univariate F Tests for British, Israel and Turkish Samples for Micro Level: Agentic Influences**

Variables	Countries	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Sd	F (Sig.) <sup>b</sup>	Results of Post Hoc Tests <sup>b,c</sup>
1. Have a free choice in making own career decisions	- British	5,36	1,66	7,375 (0,001)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	5,30	1,47		
	- Turkish	5,99	1,23		
	<i>Total</i>	5,63	1,43		
2. Own education and training	- British	5,72	1,26	4,342 (0,014)	BR different from IL and TR
	- Israel	6,18	1,15		
	- Turkish	6,27	,81		
	<i>Total</i>	6,15	1,04		
3. Own skills, competences and abilities	- British	5,82	1,21	10,328 (0,000)	BR different from IL and TR
	- Israel	6,47	,76		
	- Turkish	6,48	,73		
	<i>Total</i>	6,38	,86		
4. Own acquaintances, friends and/or family	- British	4,95	1,54	15,968 (0,000)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	4,98	1,50		
	- Turkish	5,91	1,07		
	<i>Total</i>	5,40	1,40		
5. Own knowledge of labour and/or career market	- British	5,08	1,31	24,504 (0,000)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	4,87	1,38		
	- Turkish	5,95	,91		
	<i>Total</i>	5,40	1,28		
6. Own financial and economic condition	- British	5,69	1,15	1,746 (0,177)	-
	- Israel	5,28	1,38		
	- Turkish	5,50	1,15		
	<i>Total</i>	5,45	1,25		
7. Career choices are/were influenced by own background	- British	3,92	2,18	23,986 (0,000)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	4,23	1,97		
	- Turkish	5,65	1,33		
	<i>Total</i>	4,84	1,90		

<sup>a</sup> The mean indicates the selected frequency by each group for the acceptance of the statements (variables).

<sup>b</sup> Significance level  $<0,05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Least Significant Difference (LSD) approach was used as post hoc procedure.

All dependent variables related to micro influences on career 'choice', except the 6<sup>th</sup> variable (own financial and economic condition) showed significant differences. The mean scores suggest that respondents believe that they had free choice in making their career decisions (*statement 1*). Such belief was statistically highest in the Turkish sample ( $TR_{mean}= 5,99$ ) compared to Israeli ( $IL_{mean}= 5,30$ ) and British ( $BR_{mean}= 5,36$ ) one. This is an important statement which reflects the politics of choice. At a time when privatisation of public services such as health, transportation and education is presented as offering 'choice', the belief in individual 'choice', even if it is ill founded, seems to flourish. 'Choice' with its many interlocking interpretations at the level of national politics, institutional processes, and individual activity is a multi-layered and ephemeral

concept. The belief of free choice of career reflects a purely agentic understanding of career choice, which fails to recognise any extrinsic factors that impinge upon it. A belief in such free choice underpins the globally prevalent neo-liberal ideology, which purports the idea that individuals and the markets function best when they are free from external intervention. Our survey identifies the dominance of the belief in free choice in these three countries.

A similarly high result is evident in respondents' belief in the influence of their own education and training on their career 'choice' (*statement 2*). Again the neo-liberal discourses at the macro level and the prevalence of the rhetoric of meritocracy at intermediate-institutional and organisational levels may account for such a firm belief in the significance of own education and training in career 'choice'. In our sample a belief in the impact of education and training was lowest for the British respondents ( $BR_{mean} = 5.72$ ) compare to others ( $IL_{mean} = 6.18$ ;  $TR_{mean} = 6.27$ ). In terms of overall result, it is possible to identify a convergent belief in the role of education and training. These high scores also suggest the path dependence of career 'choice', where students perceive their education a significant anchor or indicator of their prospective career 'choices'. In the same vein, respondents highlighted their own skills, competences and abilities (*statement 3*) as important influences on their career choice. Respondents from Britain ranked the influence of individual competences, skills and abilities lower ( $BR_{mean} = 5.82$ ) than the respondents from Turkey and Israel ( $IL_{mean} = 6.47$ ;  $TR_{mean} = 6.48$ ). These two forms of human capital, one of educational achievement and the other of individual learning, are widely accepted as legitimate influences on career choice in our cross-national study.

The respondents attached lesser significance to the influence of their acquaintances, friends and/or family (*statement 4*), namely the social capital, in comparison to the human capital. However, there was much cross-national divergence in this item. Whilst the Turkish respondents attached a greater importance to this ( $TR_{mean} = 5.91$ ), Britain and Israel responded in a more moderate way to this statement ( $BR_{mean} = 4.95$ ) ( $IL_{mean} = 4.98$ ). As the Turkish sample had the greater parental funding for their study, the social influences of the family on career choice may be understood accordingly in that country. However, it may also signal the legitimacy of some influences in that cultural context.

The symbolic capital, which is the dynamic and relational way that one can make use of their various forms of individual capital, is rated as the second most significant influence after human capital on career choice. However, there was also cross-national divergence in this statement on own knowledge of labour and/or career markets (*statement 5*). Whilst the Turkish respondents rated this statement highly ( $TR_{mean} = 5.95$ ), the Israeli and British respondents evaluated symbolic capital as less relevant ( $IL_{mean} = 4.87$ ;  $BR_{mean} = 5.08$ ). It is our contention that the more subtle the routes of access to a labour market, the more likely for an individual to cite their own knowledge of the labour or career markets as relevant for their choice. If the routes to career choices are well known, such self knowledge of markets would be less relevant for an individual's career 'choice'.

All respondents cited the impact of their economic capital as relevant for their career choice and there is no any statistically significant difference among the respondents from three countries (*Statement 6*) ( $BR_{mean} = 5.69$ ;  $IL_{mean} = 5.28$ ;  $TR_{mean} = 5.50$ ). However, it is very interesting to juxtapose this with the findings on influence of the own background (*statement 7*), which is also a culmination of social, economic and cultural capital that an individual may possess. The respondents in Turkey evaluated this as a significant influence ( $TR_{mean} = 5.65$ ), whereas the British and Israeli respondents rated this statement much lower ( $BR_{mean} = 3.92$ ;  $IL_{mean} = 4.23$ ). The British response may reflect the classless society discourse that prevails in British politics since



John Major's government and followed up with Tony Blair's discourses, (Mori 2000) as background suggests one's class position.

*Meso Level: From Dichotomous to Relational Influences on Career 'Choice'*

The MANOVA evaluated the influence of the independent variables of the nationality on the 9 dependent variables related to pull and push influences on career 'choice'. The overall Hotelling's Trace was significant at  $F=4,727$  ( $p=0.000$ ). These results, depicted in Table 4, show that differences among three groups were significant on eight of the nine variables.

**Table 4: Univariate F Tests for British, Israel and Turkish Samples for Meso Level: Pull and Push Influences**

Variables	Countries	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Sd	F (Sig.) <sup>b</sup>	Results of Post Hoc Tests <sup>b,c</sup>
8. Ease of access to own career of choice	- British	4,97	1,37	6,133 (0,003)	IL different from BR and TR
	- Israel	4,08	1,45		
	- Turkish	4,52	1,38		
	<i>Total</i>	4,42	1,44		
9. Lack of access to other of career options	- British	4,10	1,68	0,125 (0,882)	-
	- Israel	4,05	1,50		
	- Turkish	4,16	1,47		
	<i>Total</i>	4,11	1,51		
10. Quality of life associated with own career of choice	- British	5,31	1,59	16,516 (0,000)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	5,41	1,31		
	- Turkish	6,24	,90		
	<i>Total</i>	5,77	1,26		
11. Flexibility associated with the own career of choice	- British	5,23	1,33	5,344 (0,005)	IL different from TR
	- Israel	5,07	1,18		
	- Turkish	5,63	1,32		
	<i>Total</i>	5,35	1,29		
12. Autonomy associated with the own career of choice	- British	5,08	1,22	5,691 (0,004)	BR different from TR
	- Israel	5,48	1,13		
	- Turkish	5,79	1,22		
	<i>Total</i>	5,56	1,21		
13. Development opportunities associated with the own career of choice	- British	5,74	1,25	7,465 (0,001)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	5,91	1,14		
	- Turkish	6,36	,89		
	<i>Total</i>	6,09	1,08		
14. Promotion opportunities associated with the own career of choice	- British	5,69	1,30	12,983 (0,000)	All are different
	- Israel	6,06	1,07		
	- Turkish	6,53	,74		
	<i>Total</i>	6,22	1,02		
15. Training and education opportunities in the own career of choice	- British	5,77	1,13	10,466 (0,000)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	5,55	1,19		
	- Turkish	6,23	1,01		
	<i>Total</i>	5,90	1,14		
16. Superior financial rewards in the own career of choice	- British	5,28	1,69	4,695 (0,010)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	5,31	1,43		
	- Turkish	5,83	1,18		
	<i>Total</i>	5,54	1,39		

<sup>a</sup> The mean indicates the selected frequency by each group for the acceptance of the statements (variables).

<sup>b</sup> Significance level <0,05.

<sup>c</sup> Least Significant Difference (LSD) approach was used as post hoc procedure.

The study also explored the ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors that influence career choice as meso level influences. The ‘push’ and ‘pull’ perspective posits that individuals are ‘pushed’ into certain careers because of absence of alternative choices or they are ‘pulled’ into their careers as they are personally attracted to some career choices. As explained in the literature review, individuals

make career choices through much more dynamic and complex processes. Nevertheless, pull and push may explain some career choice behavior. In our study, in order to understand push and pull factors, respondents are asked whether their career choice was due to ease of access to their career choice (*statement 8*) or due to lack of access to other career alternatives (*statement 9*), respectively. The results suggest that pull factors had a more significant influence on career choice than push factors. The pull factors were least significant for the Israeli respondents ( $IL_{mean} = 4,08$ ) in the study compare to others ( $BR_{mean} = 4,97$  and  $BR_{mean} = 4,52$ ). There is no significant differences among nationalities for the push factors ( $BR_{mean} = 4,10$ ;  $IL_{mean} = 4,05$ ;  $TR_{mean} = 4,16$ ).

The study also explored a set of career outcomes as possible influences on career choice decision. Quality of life (*statement 10*), flexibility (*statement 11*), autonomy (*statement 12*), development and promotion opportunities (*statement 13 and 14*), training and education opportunities (*statement 15*) as well as financial rewards associated with respondents' career of choice (*statement 16*) were included as possible career outcomes that may impact on career choice decision. These aspects in all categories are highly rated by respondents from all countries with some variation in the standard deviation of their ratings (see Table 4).

#### *Macro Level: Structural Constraints on Career Choices*

According to the result of the MANOVA test, all dependent variables related to macro influences on career 'choice', depicted in Table 5, showed significant differences among nationalities. The overall Hotelling's Trace was significant at  $F=9,284$  ( $p=0.000$ ).

**Table 5: Univariate F Tests for British, Israel and Turkish Samples for Macro Level: Structural Constraints**

Variables	Countries	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Sd	F (Sig.) <sup>b</sup>	Results of Post Hoc Tests <sup>b,c</sup>
17. Career choices are/were influenced by own sex	- British	3,03	2,08	13,653 (0,000)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	2,57	1,93		
	- Turkish	3,97	1,87		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>3,14</i>	<i>2,15</i>		
18. Career choices are/were influenced by own ethnicity	- British	2,33	1,63	33,941 (0,000)	All are different
	- Israel	1,70	1,26		
	- Turkish	3,55	1,95		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>2,17</i>	<i>1,74</i>		
19. Career choices are/were influenced by own age	- British	3,44	2,14	18,724 (0,000)	TR different from BR and IL
	- Israel	2,94	1,97		
	- Turkish	4,47	1,51		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>4,21</i>	<i>1,83</i>		
20. Chance, luck and/or faith	- British	4,38	2,02	7,514 (0,000)	TR different from IL
	- Israel	3,97	1,70		
	- Turkish	4,86	1,56		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>3,69</i>	<i>1,90</i>		

<sup>a</sup> The mean indicates the selected frequency by each group for the acceptance of the items (variables).

<sup>b</sup> Significance level  $<0,05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Least Significant Difference (LSD) approach was used as post hoc procedure.

Structural constraints on career choices in the form of discrimination by sex (*statement 17*), age (*statement 19*), ethnicity (*statement 18*) was also widely reported in this study. In the dominant context of the above mentioned neo-liberal ideology, it is unsurprising to note that respondents attached very low significance to their sex, age, or ethnicity playing any role in their career

choices (see Table 5). Despite contemporary evidence which suggests that gender, age and race segregation is still prevalent in schooling and in career choice, the respondents did not identify this as such. Whilst the Turkish respondents noted the significance of own sex and own age as more relevant ( $TR_{\text{mean}} = 3,97$  and  $4,47$  respectively) than respondents from other countries, Israeli respondents reported the lowest significance for those statements ( $IL_{\text{mean}} = 2,57$  and  $2,94$  respectively). The same pattern exists for the ethnicity statement with Turkish respondents reporting the highest significance ( $TR_{\text{mean}} = 3,55$ ) and the Israel students reporting a unanimously the lowest possible rating for this item ( $IL_{\text{mean}} = 1,70$ ).

Our statement item in this study was the role of chance (*statement 20*), luck or faith, which are purely extrinsic structural factors that do not relate directly to the performance of the individual. This statement is significant as it forms the other margin of our proposed agency-structure continuum and accounts for the factors that do not yield well to other rational explanation. The results for this item was interesting as the Turkish respondents identified that this statement indeed positively influences their career choices ( $TR_{\text{mean}} = 4,86$ ). Despite greater levels of variation in Israel and British responses, they also assigned a positive significance for this item in their career choices ( $BR_{\text{mean}} = 4,38$  and  $IL_{\text{mean}} = 3,97$ ).

### *Understanding Common and Divergent Influences on Career 'Choice'*

In order to understand the variations identified above, the career choice influences are ranked in each country (Table 6) and the most and least important five influences (Table 7) are identified. The results suggest that the most significant influences display no divergence between Britain, Israel and Turkey.

**Table 6: Comparative influences on career choice by country in ranked order**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>BR</i>	<i>IL</i>	<i>TR</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Free choice	5,36	5,32	6,00	5,63
2. Education and training	5,72	6,19	6,28	6,15
3. Skills and competencies	5,82	6,48	6,48	6,38
4. Acquaintances, friends and family	4,95	5,00	5,91	5,4
5. Knowledge of career markets	5,08	4,83	5,96	5,4
6. Financial and economic condition	5,69	5,24	5,51	5,45
7. Background	3,92	4,23	5,66	4,84
8. Ease of access to career	4,97	4,07	4,54	4,42
9. Lack of access to career choices	4,10	4,04	4,17	4,11
10. Quality of life	5,31	5,37	6,20	5,77
11. Flexibility	5,23	5,04	5,62	5,35
12. Autonomy	5,08	5,45	5,81	5,56
13. Development opportunities	5,74	5,90	6,37	6,09
14. Promotion opportunities	5,69	6,05	6,55	6,22
15. Training & education opportunities	5,77	5,54	6,24	5,9
16. Financial rewards	5,28	5,25	5,82	5,54
17. Sex discrimination	3,03	2,57	3,97	3,14
18. Ethnic discrimination	2,33	1,70	3,55	2,17
19. Age discrimination	3,44	2,94	4,47	4,21
20. Chance, luck and faith	4,38	3,97	4,86	3,69

**Table 7: The most and least important influences in Britain, Greece, Israel and Turkey**

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Top Five</i>	<i>Bottom five</i>
Britain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and competencies</li> <li>• Training &amp; education opportunities</li> <li>• Development opportunities</li> <li>• Education and training</li> <li>• Promotion opportunities*</li> <li>• Financial and economic condition*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of access to career choices</li> <li>• Background<sup>x</sup></li> <li>• Age discrimination</li> <li>• Sex discrimination</li> <li>• Ethnic discrimination</li> </ul>
Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and competencies</li> <li>• Own education and training</li> <li>• Promotion opportunities</li> <li>• Development opportunities</li> <li>• Training &amp; education opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of access to career choices</li> <li>• Chance, luck and faith<sup>x</sup></li> <li>• Age discrimination</li> <li>• Sex discrimination</li> <li>• Ethnic discrimination</li> </ul>
Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion opportunities</li> <li>• Skills and competencies</li> <li>• Development opportunities</li> <li>• Education and training</li> <li>• Training &amp; education opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease of access to career<sup>x</sup></li> <li>• Age discrimination</li> <li>• Lack of access to career choices</li> <li>• Sex discrimination</li> <li>• Ethnic discrimination</li> </ul>

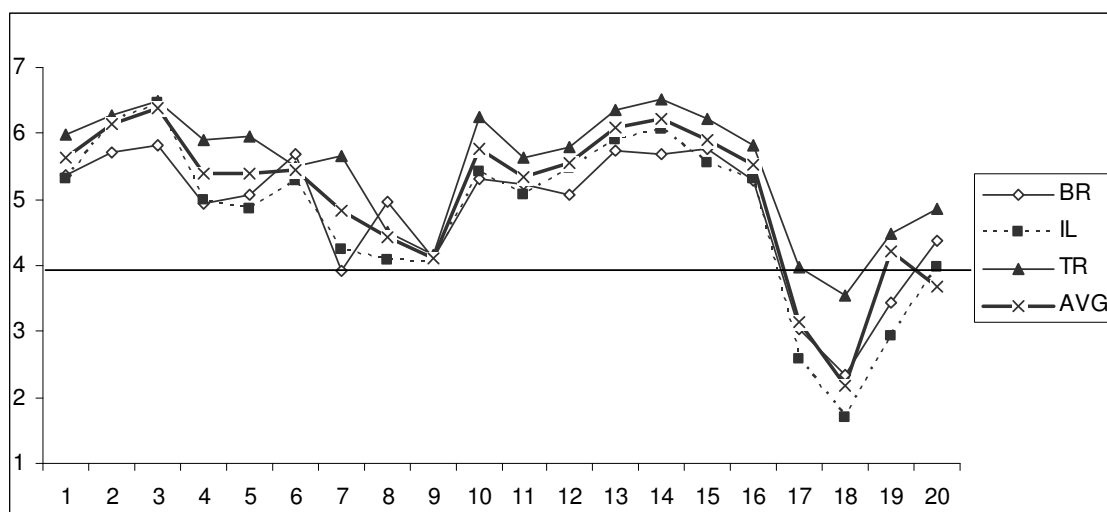
\* Ranked at the same order.

<sup>x</sup> Difference statement in bottom five.

Making sense of this convergence requires us to gain insights into the labour market dynamics, institutional settings and socio-psychological make up of the participants from Britain, Israel and Turkey. However, what was more striking was the convergence across the least significant influences in these three countries. All participants considered different forms of discrimination and other structural constraints less significant influences. This is also explored in the Figure 1.

Despite these apparently divergent influences on career choice, Figure 1 illustrates that there is indeed a strong common pattern in terms of the patterns of influences on career choice. The x-axis in the figure lists influences on career choice from pure choice (*statement 1*) to choice constrained by external influences (*statement 20*). The y-axis illustrates the mean score for each item (from a seven point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Each line represents a different country and the average. The table demonstrates that the common trend is that the respondents have a stronger belief in their individual capacity to choose over structural or extrinsic influences as the arbiter of their career choice. Using the framework of intrinsic-extrinsic influences, it is possible to argue that there is a convergence around a stronger belief in intrinsic influences between all respondents.

**Figure 1: Factors that influence career ‘choice’ by country**



Returning to our central hypothesis that ‘it is more likely for the MBA students to report agentic rather than structural conditions as key influences on their career choices’, as can be seen from the table above, it is possible to note that this hypothesis is supported as the respondents of the study have reported strong belief in their freedom to choose their career paths and the significance of the influence of the various forms of human capital that they hold on their choice of career paths. This finding may suggest the dominance of the liberal ideology that alludes to the centrality of choice over concerns of structural conditions.

## Conclusions

Our study has revealed that the factors that influence career choice can be examined along a spectrum ranging from individual agency to structural conditions, at micro, meso and macro levels of analysis. Assessment of the data on reported influences on career choice suggest a convergence on the significance of micro-individual and agentic considerations over meso-institutional/relational and macro-structural influences. Thus, the finding of our study supports our central hypotheses that the MBA students will report micro influences as more significant in their career choices than meso or macro influences. This may be the result of collectivist nature of our sample in which total proportion of Israeli and Turkish respondents was 85 percent. It is reported that agentic tendency seeks career stability which is also a feature of collectivist culture (Price, 1997 and Marshall, 1989 ). However, it is important to examine the underlying reasons for our findings.

Although considering the influence of agency and structure on a spectrum may be useful in order to understand the blurred demarcations between the two, we argue that our visual representation of structure and agency in a continuum does not suggest that structure and agency exist independent of one another. On the contrary, we hoped to explain that agentic and structural influences on career choice exist in a state of interplay.

One example may explain our argument: If we propose that a purely agentic choice is possible, we would believe that we make our career choices free from structural conditions, purely based on our orientations and individual will. Although the participants expressed a strong belief in

having freedom in their career choice, we argue that career choice does not exist in this pure agentic form. In our hypothetical example, we can identify a number of reasons for our proposition: The number of choices that we are aware of and the number of choices that exist and are available to us in reality may vary. Furthermore, there may be choices which we are not aware of, or which are unavailable to us, due to structural constraints that we may fail to recognise. Lack of awareness of our full range of choices may lead us to make use of a limited range of career alternatives or opportunity structures. Hence, we argued that structures are not only constructs external to individual agency, but are also an integral part of the way that individual agency is shaped. On the other hand, it is also our contention that individuals are neither 'pushed', nor 'pulled', nor do they exist in a state of 'drift' in making their career choices. Even in most severe structural conditions, they apply individual ingenuity, strategies and demonstrate capacity for transforming those very structures that constrain them. Therefore, it is not possible to talk about structures in isolation from individual agency either.

The heterogeneity of where structures and agency reside and the hermeneutic diversity of their form pose a challenge to the simplistic and often polarised formulations of factors that influence career 'choice'. Our measure has examined the factors that influence career 'choice'. The findings suggest a stronger belief in the significance of micro-agentic and meso-relational influences on career choices, as opposed to macro-structural constraints. The global dominance of neo-liberal ideology and its cascading influences in organisational settings through its many discourses, such as self-made man, meritocracy, rational and unconstrained choice in unregulated markets may account for the convergence of the belief in free choice in this study. Although the linkages between the macro-social, political and economic context and career choice have not been fully explored in our paper, the prevalence of this international convergence, coupled with divergent perceptions of career choice influences, suggests that these linkages should be explored.

It is also interesting to note the significant cross-national variations in terms of demographic characteristics of MBA students. A higher proportion of female MBA students and career goal as their own business were higher in Israeli sample. This seems congruent with Sagie and Weisberg (2001) that noted increase in the number of women in work life and entrepreneurial spirit. An older average age, the size of tuition fees, requirements for several years of work experience and availability of institutional funding in Britain may be regarded as a support to Richbell (2001) that noted aging population and Price (1997) stated individual efforts financing his needs instead of family. This is a typical example of individualistic behavior. Students from technical occupations in Turkey were higher than other two countries. This may be related to career choice context of Turkey (Erdoğan, 2004). When Turkish context is evaluated in terms of career choice, the centralised university entrance exam (OSS) has a significant influence and should be noted here. Since people strongly believe that university graduation provides advantages in employment in comparison to high school graduation, university entrance exam (OSS) is regarded as the most important stage and pathway for business life and employment. As a result of this belief admission to university and department, even less preferred one, is regarded more important than right matching between occupations and individual abilities. The mentioned mismatch and graduation from less preferred discipline have considerable impacts in early years of careers (Erdoğan, 2004), resulting in career choice mismatch and continuation of the career choice process. This situation may be interpreted that career decision may not end for some people and they may regard MBA as a way out of a firm career decision. Lastly, parents as the key source of funding for Turkish respondents is an indication of collectivist culture (Price, 1997).

One of the major limitations of the study is its reliance on a questionnaire survey which does not allow for hermeneutic analysis. Therefore, the study only provides a static understanding of career choice. These insights could be supplemented with a qualitative study so that an understanding of dynamic nature of career choice can be achieved. Nevertheless, the study provides cross-national and comparative insights demonstrating the strength of the belief in free 'choice' and relational influences on career 'choices' over macro-structural conditions.

## Implications

Understanding factors that impact on career choice would be instrumental in designing and delivering better informed career counselling and mentorship (Hunt and Michael 1983). Similarly, recognising the multiplicity of influences on career choice at macro, meso and micro levels of engagement may contribute to design of more comprehensive career counselling and mentorship programmes.

This paper examined the factors that impact on career choice for MBA students. Sheridan et al. (1990) note that the initial career choice of managers and the relative status of their department play a role in outcomes of their 'career tournament' such as promotion, transfer, and salary progression. Therefore identifying possible influences of career choice is important as such influences may have an impact on job entry behaviour as well as subsequent career outcomes.

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