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Emotional Intelligence and Reflexivity vs. Passivity in the Perspective of Transactional Analysis: A Research Report

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Abstract

The article constitutes a report on the research looking for relationships between emotional intelligence as understood by P. Salovey and J. D. Mayer and reflexivity understood as a cognitive style, and passivity in the light of the transactional analysis assumptions. The results show that emotional intelligence in the area of comprehension, acceptance and emotional control favours the reduction of passive behaviours in all their manifestations. Empathy, on the other hand, may intensify passive activities in the area of incapacitation understood as making oneself incapable of acting via psychosomatic symptoms. In case of reflexivity, there is a negative correlation with passivity in the area of caution, and a positive one in case of lack of self-assurance. The research was conducted with the use of CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) questionnaire technique on the group of 423 adult persons. The conclusions point to the possibility of using the assumptions of transactional analysis for building resources based on emotional intelligence and self-assurance. These, consequently, have a chance to reduce the area of passive behaviour, fostering effectiveness in the face of a problem situation.

Keywords: transactional analysis, passivity, emotional intelligence, reflectiveness.

Introduction

The ability of acting efficiently while faced with a problem, finding solutions and making decisions skilfully as well as understanding the ambiguity of interpersonal relations are key competencies that determine the effectiveness of action in the modern world. The strategies implemented by an individual faced with a difficulty, their operating methods and emotions occurring in this context determine their effectiveness. This article presents the results of the research determining potential correlations between emotional intelligence as understood by P. Salovey and J. D. Mayer (1990) and reflexivity understood as a cognitive style (Kagan, 1965, 1966), and passivity seen from the perspective of the transactional analysis assumptions (Schiff & Schiff, 1971; Schiff, et al., 1975).

Theoretical assumptions

First attempts to understand emotional intelligence focused solely on the analysis of its cognitive dimension. Pioneer attempts to broaden its definition were made by Thorndike in the 20s of the 20th century. He distinguished three equal groups of skills: abstract intelligence, deciding on how an individual deals with the world of concepts and ideas, technical intelligence, showing one's ability to function in the "world of things", and social intelligence defining one's ability to understand people and function in interpersonal contacts (Nęcka, 2003). The last one points to mental predispositions determining behaviour, including predispositions of an emotional nature, i.e. an ability to understand emotions and feelings of other people, which is the first step linking this approach to the construct of emotional intelligence (Pracka, 2021). The term "emotional intelligence" occurred in the 60s of the 20th century, in the article by H. Leuner *Emotional intelligence and emancipation* (Leuner, 1966, after: Śmieja, Orzechowski, 2008). However, it was Salovey and Mayer (1990), who could be called pioneers as far as the scientific analysis of the concept of emotional intelligence was concerned as they drew its definition and listed its components. Furthermore, it was D. Goleman (1997) who wrote about the importance of shaping emotional intelligence, possibilities of its development and improvement, its relations with life success. He was also the scientist who undoubtedly made the concept well-known. He distinguished five main components of emotional intelligence. These are: self-awareness determining knowledge about one's own experiences, preferences and possibilities; self-regulation in the context of controlling one's emotions; motivation to act; empathy as an ability to read others' emotional states and needs; social skills.

Therefore, emotional intelligence means one's abilities to process emotional information constituting the foundation of developing competencies that let us manage emotions effectively and deal with social situations and various tasks. It is also a set of abilities to read emotional meanings and take them into account while analysing and solving problems (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005). Emotional intelligence has a hierarchical structure and consists of a certain number of particular skills that are related only to some extent (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005). A basic model, important from the point of view of this study, is the model by Mayer and Salovey (1997) showing the existence of four main components: an ability to notice and express emotions, an ability to assimilate emotions in the course of cognitive processes, an ability to understand and analyse emotions, and an ability to manage emotions – control and regulate them.

Numerous studies point to the links between emotional intelligence and selected areas of human functioning. Competencies in the emotional-social area positively correlate, among others, with a need to enquire and curiosity (Żmuda, Sękowski & Szymczak, 2021), management and leadership skills (Przybylska, 2006; Sękowski & Sitko, 2018), or acting under pressure (Laborde, S., Lautenbach, F., Allen, M.S., et al., 2014). The competencies in this area, influence, among other things, interpersonal relations – the way a given person is perceived and evaluated by their social surroundings, their popularity and acceptance in the group as well as their predisposition towards antisocial and aggressive behaviour towards other people (Knopp, 2020), or human mental resilience (Wyszogrodzka & Woźniak-Prus, 2020). There is also a correlation between emotional intelligence and the occurrence of mental disorders, e.g. depression (Downey, L.A., Johnston, P.J., Hansen, et al. 2008; Żuchowicz, Skiba, Gałęcki & Talarowska, 2018; Obeid, S., Haddad, C., Fares, K. et al., 2021). Similarly, scientists also distinguish between female and male emotional intelligence (McKinley, S. K., Petrusa, E. R., Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, et al., 2014; Pracka, 2021).

The second theoretical construct constituting the foundation of this research is reflexivity. It is understood as a cognitive style, i.e. fairly stable tendency to think, perceive and process information (Perkowska-Klejman, 2019; Matczak, 2001). Reflexivity is often contrasted with impulsiveness. The first author who described reflexivity vs. impulsiveness as a cognitive style was J. Kagan (1965, 1966). This style can be defined as cognitive pace which comes to light in problematic situations. What counts here is both the speed of finding solutions and how correct they are. An impulsive person finds solutions and gives answers pretty fast, but they show the tendency to make mistakes. A reflexive person would ponder on a given solution or answer for a long time and would not make mistakes as they would look for accurate, detailed information needed to solve a problem (Perkowska-Klejman, 2019). Generally, it is agreed that reflexivity is

a more efficient strategy for problem solution than impulsiveness. It does not mean though that in certain situations reflexivity (especially very intensified) might turn out less beneficial than impulsiveness. In their experimental studies, Moritz, Siemsen and Kremer (2014, after: Matczak & Jaworowska, 2020) show that both very short and very long thinking time are less beneficial than moderate one.

It seems that both emotional intelligence and reflexivity may be important as far as disclosing human passive behaviours is concerned. Transactional analysis assumes that passivity is primarily non-efficacy in the face of a problematic situation and a way of thinking and acting that allows an individual to avoid their autonomous reaction in the face of a problematic situation (Schiff & Schiff, 1971; Schiff et al., 1975; Rogoll, 1989; Rawson, 2006; Stewart & Joines, 2009; Pierzchała, 2013). Passivity understood in this way can manifest itself through several strategies such as: doing-nothing, over-adaptation, agitation, incapacitation or violence. Doing-nothing is a situation in which an individual facing a problem gives up on being proactive and seeking a solution, hoping that the problem will solve itself or someone else will be found to overcome it. Over-adaptation is a strategy in which an individual facing a problem tries to guess what is expected from them, not focusing at the same time on their own needs and emotions. Thus, they realise external goals, *de facto* leaving out themselves. Agitation occurs in a situation when the level of tension in the face of difficulties rises to such an extent that it is necessary to discharge it quickly. In this context, an individual undertakes the activities reducing the tension yet not leading to problem solution. These are substitute activities such as doing extreme sports or reaching for stimulants. However, when the level of tension is very high, a strategy having two opposite dimensions – violence or incapacitation – might occur. The mechanism of strategy occurrence is identical here, but the direction of its manifestation is different. When the energy vector is directed outwards, an individual gets aggressive towards something or somebody in their surroundings. However, when the same energy is directed inwards, it generates incapacitation that is a peculiar kind of incapacitating oneself through psychosomatic symptoms or even a suicidal act in extreme cases.

Methodological assumptions of the research

The aim of the research is to determine potential correlations between the aforementioned passivity in all its manifestations, emotional intelligence and reflexivity. The research was conducted with the use of CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) questionnaire technique on the group of 423 adult persons, but due to various reasons (e.g. incomplete data, the response scheme used), in

case of analysing the results concerning emotional intelligence the data was reduced to 381 cases.

The research uses three questionnaire tools. Firstly, the authors used the *Popular Questionnaire of Emotional Intelligence (Popularny Kwestionariusz Inteligencji Emocjonalnej /PKIE/)* developed by A. Jaworowska, A. Matczak, A. Ciechanowicz, J. Stańczak, E. Zalewska (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005). This tool was based on the concept of emotional intelligence developed by P. Salovey and J.D. Mayer. It consists of 94 statements formed in the first person singular. The answers given are based on the 5-point scale. The questionnaire entries make up 4 scales and additionally make it possible to calculate the general result. There are the following questionnaire scales: 1) Accepting the expression and use of one's own emotions in action /AKC/; 2) Empathy, i.e. understanding and identifying other people's emotions /EMP/; 3) Control, also cognitive one, over one's emotions /KON/; 4) Understanding and realizing what one's emotions are /ROZ/. The general result encompasses all the entries included in the questionnaire. The overall reliability of the PQEI is high – Cronbach's alpha exceeds 0.90. In particular scales, it oscillates around the value of 0.80 (in the group of adults).

The other tool used in the research is the *Reflexivity Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Refleksyjności /KR/)* developed by A. Matczak (Matczak & Jaworowska, 2020). The KR allows for evaluating reflexivity as an activity linked with task-based motivation and trust in one's own possibilities, and reflexivity understood as cautiousness deriving from fear of failure and lack of self-confidence. The questionnaire consists of 75 sentences, formed in the first person singular, describing various behaviours, tastes and preferences. A given respondent evaluates the truthfulness of each sentence with regard to their own person, describing them as true or false. The questionnaire entries form two scales: 1) lack of self-confidence /NS/ and 2) Caution /ROZ/. The reliability of the tool is high. Cronbach's alpha coefficient equals: for the NS scale 0.89 for the respondents aged 18-37, and 0.84 for the respondents aged 40-78; for the ROZ, it is 0.88 for the respondents aged 18-37, and 0.83 for the respondents aged 40-78 accordingly.

The last tool used in the research was developed by the author. It is the *Passivity Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Pasywności /KP/)* that includes 5 scales (30 items) making it possible to define one's functioning in passive strategies. The respondent's evaluation is based on the 5-point scale, with the use of which the respondent says how true the aforesaid statements are with regard to their own person. The tool is currently undergoing the standardization procedure. Theoretical accuracy was verified by three competent judges. Similarly, the questionnaire's reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was determined too. It has the following values for the scales in question: doing-nothing /BIER/ 0.72, over-adaptation

/NAD/ 0.78, agitation /NPH/ 0.76, incapacitation /NZD/ 0.85, violence /AGR/ 0.85. For passivity in its general dimensions Cronbach's alpha is very high and it exceeds 0.90.

Report on research results

While analysing the data of the research, a comparison was made between the results obtained by the respondents in the area of emotional intelligence and reflexivity, and passive strategies. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine a potential correlation between the variables. The research data analysis showed several interesting correlations. First of all, it is worth looking at the results combining the general dimension of emotional intelligence and passive strategies.

Table 1

The correlation of the general result of emotional intelligence with passive strategies

PASSIVE STRATEGY	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE – general result
	The Pearson correlation coefficient (r)
Doing-nothing	-0.41**
Over-adaptation	-0.42**
Agitation	-0.39**
Violence	-0.38**
Incapacitation	-0.25**

Source: own research; N=381

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$

The data above shows that there is a significant negative correlation between the general dimension of emotional intelligence and passivity in all its manifestations. It means that a high level of emotional intelligence protects an individual against destructive passive behaviours. The general result in the PKIE questionnaire indicates emotional intelligence understood as a set of cognitive skills thanks to which an individual uses their own emotions for problem solving. These are the skills linked with realizing what one's own emotions are, understanding their cause and effect. High emotional intelligence also favours the ability to show one's emotional states and to control them at the same time when required. The aforesaid skills foster effectiveness to a great extent and what follows, they prevent employing destructive forms of functioning in the face of a problem, as seen in the light of the transactional analysis assumptions. A par-

ticularly strong relationship ($r > 0.4$) was shown in the case of the gentlest strategies – passivity and over-adaptation. Nevertheless, the remaining strategies also show a negative and significant correlation. Thus, it is worth finding out which dimensions of emotional intelligence mentioned in Salovey and Mayer's concept particularly favour effectiveness.

Table 2

The correlation of emotional intelligence dimensions with passive strategies

PASSIVE STRATEGY	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE			
	The Pearson correlation coefficient (r)			
	AKC	EMP	KON	ROZ
Doing-nothing	-0.38**	-0.06	-0.47**	-0.46**
Over-adaptation	-0.44**	-0.05	-0.46**	-0.47**
Agitation	-0.30**	-0.02	-0.55**	-0.49**
Violence	-0.21**	-0.01	-0.61**	-0.38**
Incapacitation	-0.24**	0.12*	-0.51**	-0.31**

Source: own research; N=381

AKC – Accepting the expression and use of one's own emotions in action

EMP - Empathy, i.e. understanding and identifying other people's emotions

KON - Control, also cognitive one, over one's emotions

ROZ - Understanding and realizing what one's emotions are

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,001$

Passive strategies correlate negatively with the dimensions of emotional intelligence in the area of accepting the expression and use of one's own emotions in action, understanding and realizing what one's emotional states are, and also in the area of emotion control. The dimension of empathy is an exception. In its case, there was no correlation shown with the majority of the strategies. On the other hand, as far as incapacitation is concerned – next to violence, the most destructive passive strategy – too much empathy may even strengthen it.

Accepting one's emotions and allowing them to participate in decision taking counteracts over-adaptation particularly strongly as far as the way of acting is concerned. It means that an individual who is capable of showing their emotions and does it in a consistent and relevant manner, accepting the fact that their emotions are very important for decision taking, shall be a person who is more inward looking and does not subject to external pressure. Facing a problem, they will, first of all, think what is good for them and what they feel as a result, and in such circumstances they will take a decision concerning their operating strategy. Accepting one's emotions also counteracts inertia and fosters effectiveness, protecting an individual against the compulsion to act on other passive strategies.

Understanding and being aware of one's own emotions is particularly protective in case of more gentle and less destructive passive strategies, which are doing-nothing, over-adaptation and agitation. As for emotion control, it decreases the extent to which one resorts to the most destructive strategies – once again agitation and most of all, violence and incapacitation. Thus, it is worth looking at the result distribution in the context of particular strategies. In case of doing-nothing, it turns out that it correlates to almost the same extent with controlling one's emotions, comprehending them and being aware of them. Accepting one's emotions has a slightly smaller significance here. Over-adaptation, on the other hand, correlates to a similar extent with all the three constructs of emotional intelligence. Also in this area, there were no correlations with empathy. However, it is crucial to emphasise that for more destructive strategies, i.e. agitation, violence and incapacitation, the ability to control and manage one's own emotions shall be particularly important. It is a factor that in case of more gentle strategies turned out to be less significant. The results point to the possibility of employing the assumptions of transactional analysis in order to develop emotional competencies, which shall increase the effectiveness of acting in the face of a problem, which shall be demonstrated further in the text.

An important conclusion from the research in question is the one pointing to a weak correlation between empathy and passive behaviours. It turns out that this dimension of emotional intelligence does not correlate with the majority of passive strategies. Nevertheless, in case of incapacitation, there was a weak positive correlation. It means that taking a too empathetic approach towards other people's emotions might in some cases lead to incapacitating oneself via psychosomatic symptoms, triggering one's ineffectiveness. Taking into account the value of the correlation coefficient in question, this conclusion should be subject to more thorough studies.

The other theoretical construct whose correlations with passivity were sought was reflexivity. Also in its case interesting results were obtained.

Table 3
The correlation of reflexivity with passive strategies

PASSIVE STRATEGY	REFLEXIVITY	
	<i>The Pearson correlation coefficient (r)</i>	
	Lack of self-confidence	Caution
Doing-nothing	0.53**	-0.09
Over-adaptation	0.51**	-0.10*
Agitation	0.38**	-0.20**
Violence	0.21**	-0.25**
Incapacitation	0.36**	0.00

Source: own research; N=423

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$

The data included in Table 3 shows in the most general way that passivity is supported by lack of self-confidence, whereas its selected areas might be levelled by caution to some extent. It means that persons with high results of reflexivity linked with lack of self-confidence react with passivity more often. It derives from their fear of making a mistake, which they compensate with prolonged decision time. At the same time, it does not guarantee spotting all possible solutions as fear of failure might induce actions which in transactional analysis are called discounting (Meller & Schiff, 1975; Schiff, et al., 1975; Belanger & Laube, 1979; Matkowski, 1993; Macefield & Mellor, 2006; Pierzchała, 2011). It means that these persons find it difficult to spot all possible solutions, which generates problems with decision taking, and further on they ponder on these decisions (the so-called counterfactual thinking) (Matczak & Jaworowska, 2020). Acting in such a way decreases effectiveness and triggers the occurrence of all passive strategies in all their dimensions.

The protective factor in the context of passivity in the area of over-adaptation, agitation and violence is caution. Persons obtaining high results in the ROZ scale act effectively while faced with a problem thanks to their tendency for caution, whose source is cognitive motivation and the need of cognitive control. Longer time needed to take a decision does not derive from fear of failure but from strong achievement motivation and high standards of cognitive and task functioning. They are characterized by curiosity and readiness for intellectual effort (Matczak & Jaworowska, 2020). Due to this fact they do not render to social pressure and have courage to seek their own solutions, best for themselves. They are able to tolerate tension accompanying difficult situations.

Conclusions and summary

The article presents the correlations between emotional intelligence and reflexivity, and passivity seen from the perspective of transactional analysis. The latter one is manifested as ineffectiveness in the face of a problem situation. A passive person acts in such a way so as to avoid responsibility for decisions concerning operational strategy and to pass it on to their environment. They become dependent on the environment, at the same time feeling incompetent and devoid of any other option to act. The research results demonstrate the correlations between transactional passivity and emotional intelligence and reflexivity. There is a negative correlation pointing to the value of emotional intelligence development to counter passive behaviours. However, empathy constitutes an exception here. It may foster passivity in the area of incapacitation. In case of reflexivity, its dimension linked with caution has an especially protective

character, while reflexivity deriving from lack of self-confidence strengthens passive behaviour.

It should be emphasised that the concept of transactional analysis proposes methods that enhance the development of emotional intelligence and self-confidence, which constitutes a foundation of reflexivity based on caution. First of all, the aim of developmental support should be strengthening one's personality in accordance with the assumptions of the concept, via supporting the integration of the Adult ego state and removing contaminations (Temple, 1999; 2004; Barrow, 2015; King & Temple, 2018). The next area is developing autonomy understood here as the capacity for awareness, spontaneity and intimacy (Noma, 2006; Stewart & Joines, 2009; Cook, 2022; Heath, 2022). Awareness means perceiving oneself, people and the world via all the senses as objectively as possible. Spontaneity is manifested by an ability to react to the world from the levels of all ego states, using one's own resources. Thanks to that, one has at their disposal a wider scope of possible behaviours, feelings and thoughts. Intimacy is an ability to be in a relationship with another person, as close and open as possible, without resorting to any psychological games. Getting rid of discounting, i.e. omitting certain aspects of reality important in the context of looking for solutions to a problem situation, is also a very important ability (Mellor & Schiff, 1975). Basing the assumptions of the paper directed towards development on the aforesaid areas and using operating methods based on transactional analysis aims at developing the ability to read one's own emotions and feelings, building an adequate self-image based on real capabilities and skills, developing critical thinking, independence and self-determination, practising communication skills, developing creativity, shaping an attitude of openness and tolerance, and as a result developing skills to deal with difficult situations. An example of using these methods effectively is a programme developing social competencies in pre-school and early-school children, the *Little Professor University* (Pierzchała, 2018; 2019). The programme evaluation shows that using operating methods consisting in activating children's Adult ego state and caring about the integration of the ego state while making use of all its resources renders desired effects. On the one hand, it increases the participants' self-awareness as far as analysing and controlling their emotions is concerned. On the other hand, there is a decentralization effect understood as increased capacities of analysing other people's emotional states. It means that using the assumptions of transactional analysis while working with children supports the development of emotional intelligence, which constitutes the foundation serving to eliminate or significantly limit human behaviour in the area of destructive passive strategies.

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Inteligencja emocjonalna i refleksyjność a pasywność w ujęciu analizy transakcyjnej. Raport z badań

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi raport z badań poszukujących związków pomiędzy inteligencją emocjonalną w rozumieniu P. Salovey'a i J.D. Mayera i refleksyjnością rozumianą jako styl poznawczy a pasywnością zgodną z założeniami analizy transakcyjnej. Wyniki wskazują, że inteligencja emocjonalna w obszarze rozumienia, akceptacji i kontroli emocjonalnej sprzyja redukowaniu zachowań pasywnych we wszystkich ich przejawach. Empatia z kolei może intensyfikować działania pasywne w obszarze niezdolności rozumianej jako uniezdalnianie siebie do działania poprzez objawy psychosomatyczne. Z kolei w przypadku refleksyjności ujawniono ujemną korelację z pasywnością w zakresie rozważań oraz dodatnią w przypadku niepewności siebie. Badania przeprowadzono techniką ankietową CAWI na grupie 423 osób dorosłych. Wnioski wskazują na możliwości wykorzystywania założeń analizy transakcyjnej do budowania zasobów opartych o inteligencję emocjonalną i pewność siebie. Te z kolei mają szansę zredukować obszar działania pasywnego, sprzyjając efektywności w obliczu sytuacji problemowej.

Słowa kluczowe: analiza transakcyjna, pasywność, inteligencja emocjonalna, refleksyjność.