

PREDICTING A FAST-TRACK MARITIME CAREER: CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL OFFICERS DURING TEENAGE YEARS

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Abstract

Fast-track maritime career is a topical question worldwide due to the shortage of seafarers in maritime industry. Assuming that the fast-track career officers' relevant common characteristics in adolescence could predict future maritime career speed, the research questions of this research are: What were the common characteristics of fast-track career officers when they were 16-18? Were there any statistically significant differences between the fast-track career groups and the officers with a slower career at that age?

A questionnaire survey involving 175 maritime officers was conducted in Latvia in January – October 2016, regarding officers' family context, school achievement, involvement in sports, and personality traits when they were 16-18.

Fast-track career officers perceived themselves as more conscientious, calm and more leadership oriented than the whole group in adolescence. Statistically significant differences among career-speed groups were found regarding family socioeconomic status, family atmosphere and family career support at that age.

Based on those communalities among maritime officers with a fast-track carrier when they were 16-18, maritime education and training institutions could better find and give appropriate career guidance to prospective maritime officers. Even if maritime career speed is a very individualized phenomenon, family characteristics could be studied further as a potential good predictor of fast-track maritime career.

Keywords: career success predictors, fast-track career, maritime career, maritime officers.

Introduction

Career choice is an important and often a difficult issue for adolescents. Several recent studies unfold adolescents' self-doubt, anxiety and uncertainty in career decision-making process (Negru-Subtirica, Pop, & Crocetti, 2015; Vignoli, 2015). The perception of negative aspects of the profession (barriers) has an influence in career choice (Albeit & Luzzo, 1999). High-school students (males and females) have been found to perceive very soon barriers to their future college attendance and work lives (McWhirter, 1997; McWhirter, Hackett & Bandalos, 1998). In Latvia there are many students in grades 11 and 12 who have not yet even begun to explore career possibilities seriously (Lubenko & Sebre, 2007). A recent study states that "among [Latvian students] finishing secondary school (Form 12) there are quite a lot of respondents whose career choice is rather unclear" (Jurgena, Gedrovics, & Cedere, 2014, p. 527). This delay in career decision may be an obstacle for future career development, especially in maritime field, which requires a strong personal and academic involvement from the very first study year.

In the process of choosing a career, several cultural factors are especially relevant in Latvia. Young adults try to graduate from an educational institution and to reach a career peak as soon as possible, in order to become financially independent from their family (Kolesovs, 2013). Especially among middle and low social classes, youngsters want to avoid being a financial burden for their parents, who often have low salaries and low retreats. A recent study, comparing youth prospects in a time of economic recession in different European countries, shows that Latvian Post-Soviet socio-cultural context pushes youngsters to seek for financial and emotional independence sooner than in other European countries. Poverty rates of young adults living in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia increased between 2007 and 2011 by 9%, 5.5 %, and 4.8 %, respectively for young people aged 18 – 35. The increase of subjective (self-perceived) deprivation between 2007 and 2011 was particularly high in Latvia (8.8%). This economic hardship is a push factor for young adults to leave home as soon as they find employment. In fact, in Lithuania and Latvia co-residence with parents decreased during the recession period 2005-2007 (Aassve, Cottini, & Vitali, 2013).

Maritime career is a good professional option for youngsters in Latvia, as it offers fast-track career possibilities and good salaries. Fast-track maritime career is a topical question worldwide. For example, the Northeast Maritime Institute in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, offers a new degree for fast-track maritime careers (the Associate of Applied Science of Nautical Science Degree), facilitating graduates' transition straight into vessel management positions. In addition, seafarers', and especially officers' salary, is much higher than salaries in other ashore professions. As an example, the salary of rating on tanker ships (the lowest rank) can vary from €900 to €1,700 per month. In the position of junior officer (3rd or 2nd Officer, 4th or 3rd Engineer) salary can vary from €3,000 to €5,500 per month. In position of senior officers (Master, Chief Officer, Chief Engineer, 2nd Engineer) salary starts from €7,000 per month. In Latvia, it is really difficult to have such salaries working ashore in other professions (Fernández González, Semjonovs, Bogdanecs, & Ozola, 2014).

Fast-track maritime career is also a relevant issue for maritime companies, which are interested in discovering timely good potential maritime officers. According to the latest five-year *Manpower Report* issued by the Baltic and International Maritime Council and the International Chamber of Shipping (BIMCO/ICS, 2015), the average age of acting seafarers is growing, and additional 147,500 officers will be required by 2025 to serve in the world merchant fleet. The situation is similar in Latvia, where the Latvian maritime educational establishments have difficulties to ensure long-term sustainable supply of ship officers (Gailītis, 2013). However, in Latvia, as in other European highly industrialized countries, 16-18 year-old youngsters today found less attractive working on board, and a little proportion of them is still interested in the seafaring profession (Berzins & Barbare, 2013). In this context, it is important to give appropriate and proactive career guidance to youngsters who are now 16-18, specially to those who are thinking about choosing the maritime career (Geldard, Geldard, & Foo, 2015).

The aim of this research was to examine what factors could indicate that youngsters could have a successful fast-track career as maritime officer. To address this question, it was assumed that fast-track career was influenced by several factors that could be traced back to the adolescence of successful officers. Therefore, a research was conducted among current maritime officers who had a fast-track career, looking for communalities among them when they were 16-18, assuming that these common characteristics could be considered as predictors of fast-track maritime career. The analysis focussed on some hypothetical predictors, such as family environment, their involvement in different kinds of sports, how they did at school and how was their personality like at the age of 16-18. The research questions were formulated as follows: What were the relevant common characteristics of fast-track career officers when they were 16-18 regarding their family environment, experience at school, sport practised and personality traits, compared with the other officers? And were there any statistically significant differences between the fast-track career groups and the officers with a slower career regarding these aspects?

Knowing more about the factors influencing a fast-track maritime career could help youngsters to make a more informed career choice, facilitating a proper self-assessment about one's possibilities to engage successfully in this field. This research could also help maritime institutions to discover the youngsters who have higher chances of having a fast and successful career as a maritime officer, based on communalities among maritime officers with a fast-track career when they were 16-18, and to give appropriate guidance to those who desire to enter the maritime higher education.

Theoretical Background

The Concept of Career Success

Career success has been defined as the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements that a person accumulates as a result of work experiences (Judge & Bretz, 1994; London & Stumpf, 1982). Scholars have used various operationalizations of career success in their research. Traditionally, the construct has been viewed as having conceptually distinct objective and subjective components. Empirical research on career success has tended to use mostly the objective measures, although there are studies that utilize both objective and subjective assessments (Callanan, 2003). Over the past several years, particular attention was paid to the organizational factors that have an influence on the construct, considering that individual career success can eventually contribute to organizational success (Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). Recent studies mention intrinsic fulfilment, external compensation and work-life balance as the major components of career success (Zhou, Sun, Guan, Li, & Pan, 2012).

Subjective career success indicators measure self-perceived or intrinsic career success (Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). From a subjective point of view, career success depends on the individual's perception of satisfaction with the job and with career progress. Subjective career success becomes apparent in the person's reactions to career experiences, and is associated with greater satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Beauregard, 2007). One of the subjective indicators of career success is *attitude* towards work, towards oneself, towards environment and towards life. Attitude is defined as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Positive attitude for balancing career and family commitments, as well as the actual experience of managing well competing demands from work and from home, are considered to be significant indicators of employees' perceptions of subjective career success (Tziner, Loberman, Dekel, & Sharoni, 2012). *Passion* is also mentioned as an important subjective indicator of career success. Passion at work is connected with a sense of personal vocation: the work that we have chosen to pursue is born out of a need to help and to make a difference in people's lives. Passion enhances also the ability to handle frustration and failure, and pushes to hard work. All these factors lead to a positive subjective feeling of being successful in career (Prinstein & Patterson, 2003).

Objective indicators measure objective or extrinsic career success. Even if career success is an evaluative concept, and therefore judgments of career success depend on who does the judging (Jaskolka, Beyer, & Trice, 1985), objective career success can be measured by observable exoteric metrics, such as salary and number of promotions, status, and other tangible accomplishments (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Kotter, 1982). Some researchers define objective career success as observable career accomplishments which can be measured against the metrics of pay and ascendancy (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995).

For the purposes of this research, even recognizing the importance of subjective (self-perceived) career success, it was decided to approach the research question from the perspective of a specific objective indicator of career success, namely, career speed. It should be acknowledged that this choice can be controversial, and that this perspective could be

complemented with other approaches based on subjective career success indicators. A fast-track career path is not always a sign of career excellence: for example, a recent study revealed that, in university field, academic fast-track has a bad reputation – one of unrelenting work hours that allow little or no room for a satisfying family life (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009). In addition, the possible relation between fast-track development programs and participants' frustration has also been studied (Feild & Harris, 1991). The rationale for our choice is the high relevance of career speed in the socio-cultural context of the research. As it was said before, nowadays in Latvia it is important for youngsters to become financially independent from family and to reach a career peak as soon as possible. In addition, maritime education institutions are interested in looking at predictors of fast-track career because of the shortage of seafarers in maritime industry. This is why it seemed that the perspective of fast-track career would be interesting for the readers of this research. In the next section authors' understanding of the concept of "fast-track career" is presented.

Definition of Fast-Track Career for Maritime Officers

In Latvia, the minimum education required to obtain the professional qualification of a sailor or motorman (i.e., the beginning of seaman licensed profession) is basic education (grade 9), but, to become marine officer, higher education (grade 12) is needed (CoM, 2013). At present there are 2 possible paths to get a diploma of a marine officer without work limitation: a) to enter a maritime school after finishing the basic education (grade 9), to study there for 4 years for getting a diploma of maritime officer with work limitation, and then to study 3 years more in maritime higher education; or b) to enter maritime higher education establishment after finishing the secondary education (grade 12) and to study for 4 years.

Once they graduate, young seafarers can work in navigation department or engineering department with several levels of responsibility. According to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW, 2011), after completion of higher maritime education, a young seafarer initially becomes 3rd Officer (4th Engineer in engineering department). Then s/he can become 2nd Officer (or 3rd Engineer), after that Chief Officer (or 2nd Engineer) and finally – Captain (or Chief Engineer). To become captain (or chief engineer), the candidate should have spent at sea at least 36 months, working at least 12 months as chief officer (or 2nd engineer) and 6 months under the direct supervision of a captain. The speed of career path depends not only on the level of professional competence, but also on the availability of places, the policy of the shipping company, and the opinion of the Captain on the ability of the candidate to work in a higher level of responsibility.

Considering all these factors, in this research "fast-track career" was defined as the path of a seafarer who obtained the certificate of competence as Captain or Chief engineer 7 to 9 years after entering maritime higher education. In the next section we present the rationale for the choice of the hypothetical predictors of fast-track career that were analysed in this research.

Predictors of Successful Career

Previous research in vocational psychology has investigated various individual and contextual factors that have an influence in career development process, such as family socioeconomic context, quality of relations inside the family, acculturation, self-efficacy and self-awareness, school achievement, cultural values etc. (e.g., Ghosh & Fouad, 2015; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999).

Family relationships strongly influence youngsters' career aspirations (Tziner, Loberman, Dekel, & Sharoni, 2012). For many individuals, relationships with family members are some of the most powerful and significant relational experiences in their lives (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Although there are many definitions of family, and the term has biological, sociological, and psychological connotations, in this research we focus on officers' "family of origin" (when

were 16-18 years-old). Typically, the family of origin refers to one's natural family or the family into which one is born or adopted (Nichols, 2003; Sauber, L'Abate, Weeks, & Buchanan, 1993). Already more than 50 years ago, researchers investigated the influence of the family of origin on individuals' career development. A. Roe (1956) theorized that parental styles had a significant influence on individuals' career direction, although his research findings are not supported by latter research (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Trice, Hughes, Odom, Woods, & McClellan, 1995). Recent theoretical perspectives based on family systems theory (Bowen, 1966) propose that the family operates as a system or unit, where patterns of interactions evolve, and relational aspects of the system have a significant influence on individuals' behaviour and future career development (Carr, 2000).

School achievement has also been often considered as a predictor of future career success. Regarding the transition from high school to university level, recent studies show that maintaining high school grade point average (GPA), over 3.0, correlates with enrolling in and successfully completing credit-bearing college courses (ACT, 2012; Mishook, 2012). Meeting or exceeding benchmark scores on state and national assessments also are indicative of future success (Cumpton, Schexnayder, & King, 2012). Several studies had been conducted to improve the selection of students for a concrete professional field, concluding the importance of school achievement in secondary education as a predictor of further success in studies and career. In the field of medical studies, Z. Meshkani (2004) reports that no factor has predicted college achievement of students more accurately than high school GPA, even acknowledging that parent's education and occupation influence the students' attitudes toward their higher education studies. Some studies address also the importance of youngsters' "vocational situation status" (i.e., the student's perceived level of conviction that s/he made has already made the right career choice) in further career development (Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980).

In recent research, personality is associated with career success in different ways. Some studies, drawing from the model of emergent interactive agency (Bandura, 1989), examine proactive personality and self-control as predictors of extrinsic and intrinsic career success (Converse, Pathak, DePaul-Haddock, Gotlib, & Merbedone, 2012). Personality might associate with extrinsic career success directly (if traits such as assertiveness, emotional stability, and leadership motivation "fit" the tasks of the employee) or indirectly, through human capital and motivational variables: e.g., those more open to new experiences may accept more international assignments, while persons with a more conscientious personality can accept working evenings or long hours (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Consensus is emerging that a five-factor model of personality, often termed the "Big-Five", can be used to describe the main salient aspects of personality (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999).

Several studies investigated also the influence of gender (Goldin, 2004) and genetics (Ariga, Ohkusa, & Brunello, 1999) on fast-track career paths. Considering the specificity of maritime career, we were interested in investigating also if involvement in sports could be considered as a hypothetical predictor of fast-track career. The practice of sport not only includes learning positive health habits and becoming physically fit, but enhances youth development holistically, as it demands the use and development of diverse competencies, such as sport ethics, self-worth, team working, adaptation abilities, optimism, hope, ability to set goals and manage stress etc., which can help a young person in their current life and in their future career (Gould & Carson, 2008).

Taking into account this literature review, four hypothetical predictors of fast-track maritime career were chosen for analysis in this research: family context (including socioeconomic characteristics of the family, the career support received from family, and the quality of the internal relations in the family), school achievement (including self-reported marks at school, subject matter preferences, and vocational situation status (decided, waiting, hesitating) at the age of 16-18), personality characteristics (the Big-Five personality construct), and involvement in sports.

Methodology of Research

General Background

In order to answer to the research questions, it was decided to conduct a research based on a social survey approach (De Vaus, 2013; Bryman, 2015), which allowed obtaining standardised information from a large group of seafarers. Using a questionnaire was chosen as a survey method.

The research was conducted at the Novikontas Maritime Training Centre (NMTC) of Riga, (Latvia), which has a relevant data base of current and former seafarers. The NMTC provides a wide range of training courses for seafarers in accordance with the requirements of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW, 2011), as well as upgrade programs for Navigators and Marine Engineers. It was established in Latvia in 2005 as an affiliated company of the Novikontas Maritime Training Centre in Klaipėda (Lithuania).

The questionnaire was elaborated and piloted in January – April 2016. Data were collected in May – June 2016. In Summer 2016 data were processed and analysed, and the interpretation of the data and elaboration of conclusions took place in Autumn 2016.

Research Instruments

Due to the novelty of the perspective of this research, none of the existing standardized questionnaires were suitable for answering to the research questions. Therefore, a new questionnaire was designed and validated. First, three exploratory semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013) with young captains with a fast-track career were conducted, in order to define the topics to be included in the questionnaire. Respondents were chosen based on their availability and their personal contacts with the researcher team. During the preliminary interviews, it was also important to determine whether the respondents remembered easily enough the information required from them, or if some issues provoked respondent's confusion, reluctance or hesitancy, etc. Interviews were audio-recorded and analysed using AQUAD 7 software. Based on the results of the analysis, the questionnaire was elaborated and piloted with ten respondents whose profile corresponded to the needs of the research. Respondents' feedback was used for adjusting the questionnaire (some of the questions were rephrased, the order of questions was modified, some items were eliminated).

The final questionnaire contained information about respondents' profile (including the age when respondent accessed to the current position, for creating career-speed groups), schooling and career perspectives, involvement in sport activities, personality characteristics (Big-Five) and characteristics of the family. It included closed questions (where respondents should choose one answer from the list), as well the scale questions (5-point Likert scale) and open questions about respondents' past activities, motivation to choose maritime profession, and hobbies at age 16-18. The questionnaire was prepared both in paper and electronic format. Both versions were identical.

Sample Description and Data Collection Procedures

Most of the respondents completed the questionnaire on line, using the link to the electronic questionnaire that was sent to their e-mail. In order to avoid excluding from the research those new captains or chief engineers whose current position was not still updated in the NMTC data base, the electronic questionnaire was sent to all 3984 marine officers from all ranks and departments (deck and engine) from NMTC data base, asking them to fill the questionnaire only if they were already captains or chief engineers. A control question ("Please, indicate your current position") was included in the questionnaire. 314 electronic questionnaires

were received. During the data cleaning process it was found that 189 respondents had not yet reached the position analyzed in this research (captains and chief engineers), and therefore only 125 electronic questionnaires were retained for analysis.

In addition, 50 paper questionnaires were collected in the premises of the NMCT from different captains and chief engineers during their training courses or upgrading programs. Therefore, overall, 175 questionnaires were collected (125 electronic questionnaires and 50 paper questionnaires). The collected answers were introduced in a common data base in MS Excel and transferred to SPSS software for analysis.

As regards the profile of the respondents (captains and chief engineers), all of them were males. Almost one third were from Riga, the capital of Latvia (N=53, 30%), one quarter from other Latvian regions (N=46, 26.28%) and the rest from other Baltic countries (N=76; 43.42%). The age range when respondents took their position as captain/chief engineer varies between 24-61 years (Mean=37.47; SD=5.87).

Data Analysis

For further data analysis, respondents were divided into three groups, according to their career speed: *Fast-track* career: respondents, who reached the position of masters or chief engineers 7 to 9 years from the moment of entering maritime higher education (N=50, 28.5%); *Normal career path*: respondents who reached this position between 10 and 15 years after entering maritime higher education (N=79, 45.2%); and *slow career speed*: respondents who reached this position more than 15 years from the moment of entering maritime higher education (N=46, 26.3%).

Various methods were used for the data analysis: frequency analysis for descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation for comparison between groups, Cramer's V method for analysing the statistical significance of group differences. The validity of the data set was tested using Cronbach's alpha test ($\alpha=0.620$). The results are presented in the next section.

Results of Research

Descriptive Results

Family characteristics. Respondents' reported family characteristics, including socioeconomic status, parents' education, family career support, family composition and atmosphere in the family, are presented below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Family characteristics.

Score*	1 N (%)	2 N (%)	3 N (%)	4 N (%)	5 N (%)	Total N (%)
Family socioeconomic status (1=Low; 2=Lower Middle; 3=Middle; 4=Higher Middle; 5=Upper)						
Overall	32 (18.4)	40 (23.0)	80 (46.0)	21 (12.1)	1 (0.6)	174 (100.0)
Fast-track	13 (26.0)	12 (24.0)	16 (32.0)	8 (16.0)	1 (2.0)	50 (100.0)
Parents' education (1= Less than 12 years at school; 2=High school grad.; 3=College student; 4=College grad.; 5= Professional HE grad.)						
Overall	38 (21.7)	25 (14.3)	12 (6.9)	42 (24.0)	58 (33.1)	175 (100.0)
Fast-track	8 (16.0)	8 (16.0)	1 (2.0)	12 (24.0)	21 (42.0)	50 (100.0)
Family support (1=Emotional support; 2=Financial support; 3=No support; 4=Emotional and Financial support)						
Overall	58 (33.3)	16 (9.2)	26 (14.9)	74 (42.5)	-	174 (100.0)
Fast-track	24 (48.0)	4 (8.0)	5 (10.0)	17 (34.0)	-	50 (100.0)
Family composition (1= Mother and father); 2=Single (mother or father); 3=Living with family relatives; 4=Orphan (not living with parents)						
Overall	132 (75.4)	37 (21.1)	3 (1.7)	3 (1.7)	-	175 (100.0)
Fast-track	36 (72.0)	13 (26.0)	1 (2.0)	0 (0.0)	-	50 (100.0)
Atmosphere in the family (1=Stressful/Conflictive; 2=Friendly/Loving, supporting; 3=Calm / Normal)						
Overall	16 (9.10)	69 (39.4)	90 (51.4)	-	-	175 (100.0)
Fast-track	5 (10.0)	13 (26.0)	32 (64.0)	-	-	50 (100.0)

Almost half of the families of the fast-track career group provided only emotional – not financial support (Mode=1; N=24, 48%), and only one third of them (N=17, 34%) were reported to provide both emotional and financial support (N=17). On the contrary, for the overall group of respondents the proportions are inverted: most of the respondents received both emotional and financial support from their families (Mode=4: N=74, 42.5%), and only one third received just emotional support (N=58; 33.3%). 50% of the fast-track group perceived family socioeconomic status as low or lower-middle (N=25; 50%), which is a slightly higher proportion than for the whole group (41.49%). The majority of the respondents' parents were "Graduates or had professional higher education" (N=58; 33.1%), and this tendency is more marked in the fast-track group (N=21; 42%). Similarly to the overall group, most of fast-track group respondents were living in full families (N=36, 72%; overall: N=132, 75.4%). In most of the cases, the fast-track group's family atmosphere was rated as "calm/normal" (N=32; 64%; overall, slightly lower: N=90; 51.4%) or "friendly/loving, supporting" (N=13; 26%; overall, slightly higher: N=69; 39.4%). Summarizing the most salient family characteristics of fast-track career group, it can be said that they mostly provided only emotional – non-financial support, whereas, overall, most of the respondents received both emotional and financial career support. Half of fast-track career respondents perceived their family socioeconomic status as low or lower-middle, which is slightly higher proportion than for the overall group. The majority of the fast-track career respondents' parents were graduates or had professional higher education, and were living in full families whose atmosphere, in most of the cases, was rated as "calm/normal".

Schooling and career perspectives. The description of the respondents' schooling and career perspectives when they were 16-18 is presented next (see Table 2).

Table 2. Schooling and career perspectives.

Score*	1	2	3	4	5	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Marks at school (1=Very low; 2=Rather Low; 3=Middle; 4=Quite high; 5=Very high)						
Overall	0 (0)	1 (0.6)	68 (38.9)	85 (48.6)	21 (12.0)	175 (100.0)
Fast-track	0 (0)	0 (0.0)	17 (34.0)	24 (48.0)	9 (18.0)	50 (100.0)
Subject preferences (1=Humanities; 2=Sciences; 3=Both)						
Overall	19 (10.9)	70 (40.0)	86 (49.1)	-	-	175 (100.0)
Fast-track	4 (8.0)	26 (52.0)	20 (40.0)	-	-	50 (100.0)
Future career choice (1=I knew I would go to MET; 2=I had several options to choose from; 3=I had no idea about my future profession)						
Overall	103 (59.2)	48 (27.6)	23 (13.2)	-	-	175 (100.0)
Fast-track	28 (56.0)	16 (32.0)	6 (12.0)	-	-	50 (100.0)

Fast-track career respondents more often preferred exclusively “science” subjects (Mode=2), whereas the overall tendency is to feel comfortable with both subjects (overall Mode=3). Similarly to the whole group, most of fast-track career respondents reported marks at school as “quite high” (N=24, 48.0%; overall: N=68, 38.9%) and they were confident in their choice of maritime career (“I knew I would go to maritime education”: N=28; 56.0%; overall: N=103, 59.2%). Summarizing, fast-track career respondents reported marks at school as “quite high” and were confident in their choice of maritime career, similarly to the whole group. But they more often preferred exclusively “science” subjects, whereas the overall reported tendency was to feel comfortable with both subjects.

Involvement in sport activities. The description of the respondents’ involvement in sport activities when they were 16-18 is presented next. In this research, based on a standardized classification of sports (Mitchell, Haskell, Snell, & Van Camp, 2005), it was decided to look at the social character of the sport (individual, pair or team), combined with the intensity of physical effort demanded (relax or active). Respondents were asked to evaluate their involvement in 6 different kinds of sport when they were 16-18: individual – relax, individual – active, pair – relax, pair – active, team – relax and team – active (see Table 3).

Table 3. Involvement in sports.

Score*	1		2		3		4		5		Total	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
<i>Involvement in individual – relax sports (yoga, golf, bowling, diving)</i>												
Overall	109	(63.7)	27	(15.8)	22	(12.9)	12	(7.0)	1	(0.6)	171	(100)
Fast-track	29	(58.0)	16	(32.0)	3	(6.0)	2	(4.0)	0	(0.0)	50	(100)
<i>Involvement in individual – active sports (running, swimming, body building, orientation etc.)</i>												
Overall	20	(11.5)	23	(13.2)	55	(31.6)	63	(36.2)	13	(7.5)	174	(100)
Fast-track	5	(10.0)	9	(18.0)	16	(32.0)	18	(36.0)	2	(4.0)	50	(100)
<i>Involvement in pair – relax sports (chess, billiard, cricket etc.)</i>												
Overall	43	(25.0)	59	(34.3)	52	(30.2)	16	(9.3)	2	(1.2)	172	(100)
Fast-track	12	(24.0)	16	(32.0)	15	(30.0)	6	(12.0)	1	(2.0)	50	(100)
<i>Involvement in pair – active sports (table tennis, tennis, boxing, squash etc.)</i>												
Overall	31	(17.9)	35	(20.2)	55	(31.8)	40	(23.1)	12	(6.9)	173	(100)
Fast-track	12	(24.0)	11	(22.0)	16	(32.0)	8	(16.0)	3	(6.0)	50	(100)
<i>Involvement in team – relax sport (sailing, team orientation, etc.)</i>												
Overall	93	(54.7)	28	(16.5)	35	(20.6)	10	(5.9)	4	(2.4)	170	(100)
Fast-track	30	(60.0)	8	(16.0)	9	(18.0)	1	(2.0)	2	(4.0)	50	(100)
<i>Involvement in team – active sports (football, hockey, rowing, basketball etc.)</i>												
Overall	19	(11.1)	25	(14.6)	47	(27.5)	42	(24.6)	38	(22.2)	171	(100)
Fast-track	7	(14.0)	8	(16.0)	14	(28.0)	10	(20.0)	11	(22.0)	50	(100)

(*) 1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=From time to time; 4=Often; 5=Very Often

Individual – active sports were the most popular among fast-track career respondents, as well as for the whole group. Most of the respondents answered that they practised them “often” (N=63; 36.2%) and “from time to time” (N=55; 31.6%). *Team – active sports* were also popular: only 14.0% (N=7) of the fast-track career group reported that they never practised them (overall: N=17, 11.1%). 42% (N=21) of fast-track career group practised this kind of sport often or very often (overall: 46.8%, N=80). Contrarily, *individual – relax sports* were not at all popular among fast-track career respondents: 90% of them never or rarely involved in this kind of sport (overall: 79.5%). Fast-track career respondents were also slightly less attracted by *pair – active sports* than the whole group: 46% of fast-track career respondents (N=23) reported to practice them “never” or “rarely”, compared to 38.1% (N=66) overall. 60% of fast-track career group never practiced *team – relax sports* (overall: 57%). Summarizing fast-track career respondents’ involvement in sports, it can be said that, similarly to the whole group, individual – active and team-active sports were the most popular, whereas individual – relax and team – relax sports were not very popular among them.

Personality characteristics. We present next the description of the respondents’ self-reported personality characteristics when they were 16-18, following the Big-Five classification of personality features (see Table 4).

Table 4. Self-reported personality characteristics (Big-Five).

Score	1		2		3		4		5		Total	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Closed (1) vs Open-minded (5)												
Overall	3	(1.7)	11	(6.4)	60	(34.9)	79	(45.9)	19	(11.0)	172	(100.0)
Fast-track	1	(2.0)	6	(12.0)	11	(22.0)	26	(52.0)	6	(12.0)	50	(100.0)
Disorganised (1) vs Conscientious (5)												
Overall	0	(0)	8	(4.6)	41	(23.7)	89	(51.4)	35	(20.2)	173	(100.0)
Fast-track	0	(0)	1	(2.0)	9	(18.0)	27	(54.0)	13	(26.0)	50	(100.0)
Introverted (1) vs Extraverted (5)												
Overall	3	(1.7)	15	(8.7)	66	(38.2)	63	(36.4)	26	(15.0)	173	(100.0)
Fast-track	0	(0)	6	(12.0)	20	(40.0)	15	(30.0)	9	(18.0)	50	(100.0)
Disagreeable (1) vs Agreeable (5)												
Overall	1	(0.6)	15	(8.8)	63	(36.8)	80	(46.8)	12	(7.0)	171	(100.0)
Fast-track	1	(2.0)	4	(8.0)	18	(36.0)	23	(46.0)	4	(8.0)	50	(100.0)
Calm (1) vs Nervous (5)												
Overall	19	(11.1)	61	(35.7)	68	(39.8)	19	(11.1)	4	(2.3)	171	(100.0)
Fast-track	6	(12.0)	21	(42.0)	15	(30.0)	6	(12.0)	2	(4.0)	50	(100.0)
Leadership (1) vs Operational (5)												
Overall	28	(16.2)	45	(26.0)	61	(35.3)	34	(19.7)	5	(2.9)	173	(100.0)
Fast-track	14	(28.0)	10	(20.0)	15	(30.0)	8	(16.0)	3	(6.0)	50	(100.0)

The main characteristic of fast track respondents' self-reported personality compared with the whole group is that, as adolescents, they thought they were more *calm* than *nervous* (for the overall group: Mode=3; N=68, 39.8%, but for the fast-track career group: Mode=2 (closer to "calm"); N=21, 42%). After analysing the dyad *leadership vs operational*, it appeared that almost 30% of fast-track respondents considered themselves definitively to be leaders during adolescence rather than "operational" (score 1: 28%, N = 14), whereas only 16.2% of the overall group considered themselves as such (N=28). Fast track career respondents consider themselves slightly more conscientious than the overall group: the Mode for both groups is 4, but taking scores 4 and 5 together slight differences appear (fast-track career: 80%, N = 40, compared to 71.6%, N = 124 for the overall group). Similarly to the whole group, they reported themselves overall as more open-minded than closed, with a Mode of 4 (N=26; 52%). They are nor *introverted* or *extraverted* (Mode=3, N=20, 40%) and they see themselves as *agreeable* rather than *disagreeable* (Mode=4; N=23, 46%). Summarizing, fast-track career respondents consider themselves as more calm, leadership-oriented and conscientious than the overall group. They also think they were open-minded and acceptably agreeable.

Summary of descriptive results. Summarizing, maritime officers with a fast-track career received little financial support for career choice, as their parents were reported to have a lower socioeconomic status than the whole group. They preferred science topics, and they perceive themselves as more calm, leadership-oriented and conscientious than the whole group. Similarly to the whole group, they mostly had full families (mother and father) with middle socioeconomic status and a calm/normal atmosphere, they got quite high marks at school and they were confident in their career choice. They practiced team and individual active sports often or very often, and they considered themselves to be quite open-minded and acceptably agreeable during adolescence.

Analysis of Differences between Career Speed Groups

The differences between career speed groups were analysed using the Cramer's V test on all the variables. One of the most relevant findings of this research is that statistically significant differences were found only regarding some of the family aspects: kind of career support received in the family, atmosphere in the family and perceived socioeconomic status of their family.

Statistically significant difference between career speed groups was observed in the kind of career support received in the family (Cramer's $V=.211$; $p=.017$). The analysis of the Cross tabulation (see Table 5) showed that almost half (48.0%) of the fastest officers received only emotional career support from their family (Mode=1, whereas for the other groups the mode was 4: emotional and financial support). It can be noted also that 28.3 % of the officers with slow career track reported that they did not receive family support, compared with around 10.0% for the two other groups.

Table 5. Kind of support received from family for career choice.

Score*	1	2	3	4	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Slow/very slow-track	13 (28.3)	3 (6.5)	13 (28.3)	17 (37.0)	46 (100)
Middle-track	21 (26.9)	9 (11.5)	8 (10.3)	40 (51.3)	78 (100)
Fast/very fast-track	24 (48.0)	4 (8.0)	5 (10.0)	17 (34.0)	50 (100)
Overall	58 (33.3)	16 (9.2)	26 (14.9)	74 (42.5)	174 (100)

(*) 1=Emotional; 2=Financial; 3=No support; 4=Emotional and financial

There were also statistical significant differences between groups regarding the atmosphere in the family (Cramer's $V=.196$; $p=.010$. See Table 6): Two thirds (64.0%) of the fastest officers had calm/normal family relations, but this proportion was significantly lower for the two other groups. It can be noted also that 15.2% of the officers with slow career track had stressful/conflictive relationships in their families, but this proportion was significantly lower for the two other groups.

Table 6. Atmosphere in the family.

Score *	1	2	3	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Slow/very slow	7 (15.2)	14 (30.4)	25 (54.3)	46 (100)
Middle-track	4 (5.1)	42 (53.2)	33 (41.8)	79 (100)
Fast/very fast	5 (10.0)	13 (26.0)	32 (64.0)	50 (100)
Overall	16 (9.1)	69 (39.4)	90 (51.4)	175 (100)

(*) 1=Stressful/Conflictive relationships; 2=Friendly/Loving, supporting; 3=Calm/Normal

There were also statistical significant differences (Cramer's $V=.213$; $p=0.46$) between groups regarding the perceived socioeconomic status of their family at the age of 16-18 (see Table 7). Half (50.0%) of the officers with a fast career had parents with low or lower-middle socioeconomic status, which is a significantly higher proportion than for the other two groups.

Table 7. Family socioeconomic status.

Score *	1	2	3	4	5	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Slow/very slow-track	11 (23.9)	6 (13.0)	26 (56.5)	3 (6.5)	0 (0)	46 (100)
Middle-track	8 (10.3)	22 (28.2)	38 (48.7)	10 (12.8)	0 (0)	78 (100)
Fast/very fast-track	13 (26.0)	12 (24.0)	16 (32.0)	8 (16.0)	1 (2.0)	50 (100)
Overall	32 (18.4)	40 (23.0)	80 (46.0)	21 (12.1)	1 (0.6)	174 (100)

(*) 1=Low; 2=Lower Middle; 3=Middle; 4=Higher Middle; 5=Upper

Summarizing the main statistical significant differences between speed groups, it can be said that most of the officers with fast-track career received only emotional – not financial support from their family, they reported more often calm/normal family relations, and their family socioeconomic status was perceived as being lower than in the other groups.

Discussion

This discussion is structured around two topics, according to the research questions: the relevant common characteristics of fast-track career officers when they were 16-18 (regarding personality traits and involvement in sports); and the statistically significant differences between the fast-track career groups and the officers with a slower career (regarding the family characteristics).

As regards their common personality characteristics, as it was said, officers with a fast-track career participating in this research think they were quite open-minded and acceptably agreeable during adolescence, and they perceived themselves as more conscientious, calm and being more leadership-oriented than the whole group at that age. It seems that personality traits have a certain impact in future career success: recent studies (e.g., Wille, De Fruyt, & Feys, 2013) provided a careful description of the relations between personality and career success, and examined the prospective effects of psychological traits on career success assessed 15 years later, showing that career success is significantly and substantially predicted by Big-Five traits, although the predictive validity of separate traits was also found to vary across time. According to recent research, a high percentage of people believe that communication skills (extroverted psychologic characteristic) are very important for the successful completion of every day professional tasks (Fragoulis & Phillips, 2011). But on the other side, some researchers (Etzel & Nagy, 2016) recently found that personality traits did not improve the prediction of academic success, compared with other factors such as students' perceptions of person–environment fit.

It could be discussed if the previously mentioned personality characteristics could have a positive impact specifically on fast-track maritime career. Given the characteristics of the everyday work of maritime officers, it seems that leadership orientation would facilitate the rapid acquisition of the sense of responsibility that is necessary for making fast progress in maritime career. An agreeable character, together with professional competence and conscientiousness, probably plays also a positive role in creating a favorable impression on the captains that supervised those young seafarers during the different career steps. A calm personality can help to deal with the long periods at sea that are necessary for a fast progress in the career when they are still quite young, and open-mindedness could play a positive role in accepting the available places when the opportunity appears. The results of this research do not allow to verify these hypothesis, and more longitudinal research is needed for investigating these factors.

As regards the kind of sport practiced, *individual – active* sports were the most popular among the fast-track career participants, and most of them practised often or very often *team – active* sports. Involvement in sports could have an influence on the choice of maritime career. In recent research there is some evidence about the relations between leisure and vocational

interests. For example, Leuty, Hansen and Speaks (2015), using Latent Profile Analysis method, highlighted that some leisure interests are highly related to vocational interests, such as interests in social, artistic, and realistic activities. More research is needed to investigate whether any kind of sport practised has a direct influence on the choice of maritime career.

As regards career speed itself, it seems that the previously mentioned sport activities could hypothetically have a positive impact on it. Young seafarers certainly may have a good physical preparation in order to carry out the tasks that are entrusted to them, and involvement in individual active sports certainly help to develop this ability. In addition, the involvement in active team sports during adolescence could help to develop the team-working skills that are necessary for implementing a number of common tasks onboard. Moreover, recent research established that life-skills acquired by practising sports can help a young person not only to succeed in the sport he or she is playing, but also help the individual once he or she transfers the skills to non-sport settings in which they are used successfully (Gould & Carson, 2008). Certainly, efforts need to be made to transfer sport-based skills to other life situations, but it might be argued that competencies developed through sport are often actually employed by the young person in different settings (Gould & Carson, 2008). However, this research does not provide clear evidence about the impact of the kind of sport practised on maritime career speed, and more research is needed to establish more precisely which sport-based skills foster fast-track maritime career.

One of the most relevant findings of this research is that statistically significant differences between career speed groups were found regarding some of the family aspects: socioeconomic status of their family, kind of career support received in the family and atmosphere in the family. The majority of the fast-track officers had full families (mother and father) with a background of lower to middle social statuses. This is somewhat in line with the fact that the fast track officers describe their families as less supportive concerning family financial assets. Lower financial support may enhance youngsters' sense of responsibility and the need of having a fast-track career for being financially independent from the family as soon as possible, as was explained in the introduction.

Another statistically significant difference was that fast-track career respondents reported emotional career support and a calm/normal atmosphere in the family more often than the slower career track officers. The impact of these characteristics on fast-track career can be discussed. From one side, recent research shows that both perceived career-specific parental involvement and warmth were somehow associated with goal-related stress three years after finishing secondary education (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013), which could be counterproductive for a high career speed. On the other hand, some researchers stress the role of positive parent-child relations in promoting high vocational aspiration among adolescent (Sadolikar, 2016). Other studies (Metheny & McWhirter, 2013) suggest that both family stability and family support are associated with social cognitive career development outcomes of young adults in college. There are studies that show that one of the predictors of college student success is parents' "memorable messages" encouraging and supporting hard work during the studies (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012). A recent study on African American, Asian, Latino, and White college students showed that for all participants, career-related parent support accounted for a significant portion of the coping efficacy with educational and career barriers (Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin, & Lucas, 2013), which may have a positive impact on career speed.

Several limits can be acknowledged in this research: the respondents had to report in retrospect about the data referring to the family of origin, school, or to personality, which could have had an impact on the reliability of results. The subjectivity involved in using traditional rating scales could have been partially reduced using behaviourally anchored rating scales or other techniques to be sure whether all of respondents had the same criteria in mind when thinking back to the time in question. The analyses of the variables were conducted separately, and no controls were used (family composition, schooling, etc.). Finally, as indicated in the theoretical section, the objective perspective of career success should be complemented with other studies based on subjective career success indicators.

Conclusions

Youngsters who are deciding about their future profession may be attracted by maritime career, which offers fast-track career possibilities and good salaries. In this research, communalities among maritime officers with a fast-track maritime career when they were 16-18, regarding family environment, experience at school, sport practised and personality traits, were analysed, assuming that these common characteristics could be seen as the predictors of fast-track maritime career.

One of the most relevant findings of this research is that statistically significant differences among career-speed groups were found regarding the families of the fast-track career officers: these families had more often a middle-low socioeconomic status and a normal/calm family atmosphere than those of officers with a slower career, and they provided emotional rather than financial career support. In addition, fast-track career officers perceived themselves as more conscientious, calm and leadership oriented than the slower career groups in adolescence.

These findings are relevant for those maritime education and training institutions that are eager to discover youngsters who could become successful maritime officers quite fast. Based on communalities among maritime officers with a fast-track career when they were 16-18, these institutions could also give more appropriate guidance to young adolescents who desire to enter maritime education and training.

Career speed is a very individualized phenomenon that cannot be easily reduced to a number of initial parameters. In order to foster career success and a fast career progress in maritime education, it is certainly necessary to be aware of students' family characteristics, personality and academic records, but a personalized approach to each student is most important.

Many knowledge gaps remain still regarding the prediction of fast-track maritime career. Some issues could be suggested for further research: It may be interesting to study several fast-track career factors in their interplay, using for example discriminant analyses, in order to look at different variables and their impact on career speed in a single analysis. The impact of personality characteristics on fast-track maritime career could be studied deeper, using standardized personality scales and regression analysis. For future research, it could be also useful to explore the impact on maritime career speed of other possible factors that were not addressed in this research.

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