

The Effects of Personality on Protean and Boundaryless Career Attitudes

Abbas Ali Rastgar ¹, Elham Ebrahimi ^{*2}, Maryam Hessian ²

1. Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior Management, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran

2. Ph.D. Candidate of Human Resource Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding Author: E-mail: Elhebrahimi@ut.ac.ir

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Protean career
Boundaryless career
Personality big five model

ABSTRACT

Career literature is discussing the decline of the traditional career. Protean and boundaryless career attitudes are considered as two important approaches in the contemporary career era. While recent research has begun to recognize the links between career attitudes and other dispositional or behavioral factors, more empirical studies need to be done to enrich theory. In this regard, the present study examines the relation of personality aspects to protean and boundaryless career attitudes. The results of the Pearson correlation test based on a survey conducted among a sample of 380 employees working in one of the subsidiaries of National Iranian Oil Company, demonstrated that in general, personality had direct effects on career attitudes. In fact some of personality traits could be antecedents of protean and boundaryless career attitudes. Specifically, high agreeable individuals incline less to protean career orientation and in contrast, extroverted and open to experience people tend to follow protean and boundaryless careers more.

© 2014 International Journal of Business Management and Economics. All rights reserved for Academic Journals Center.

1. Introduction

In the recent decades there have been extensive discussions on the changing career environment. Traditional career arrangements emphasize vertical progression in one or two firms and the amount of success is defined by the organization in terms of increased responsibility and salary (Segers et al., 2008). In new approaches to career field, the psychological contract between employer and employee does no longer automatically include a promise of lifetime employment and steady career advancement. That is, employees have to engage in a range of career self-management activities to create career options that allow them to realize their personal career goals and ensure their employability (De Vos & Soens, 2008). According to Briscoe and Hall (2006) protean career refers to a career that is driven by the person, not the organization. De Filippi and Arthur (1994) defined boundaryless career as a sequence of job opportunities that goes beyond the boundaries of any single employment settings. Despite the success of the protean and boundaryless career perspectives in the academic world, little empirical research exists in general to support the theoretical propositions around them (Segers et al., 2008). Several authors considered demographic variables such as gender, age; education level as well as cultural differences which are hypothesized to influence the protean and boundaryless career attitudes (see e.g. Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2012; Segers et al., 2008; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003). However, in the field of dispositional or behavioral factors such as individual personality or work-related values affecting the new approach in career attitudes, more empirical studies need to be done. In addition, both the protean and boundaryless career models have been developed in the United States and tested in US or Western Europe (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Thus, these career models need to be examined empirically in other cultural contexts. The main focus of this study is to explore which personality aspect might be related to a protean or boundaryless career attitude. For achieving this purpose, according to Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth (2006), we consider self-directed career management and values-driven career orientation as the main dimensions representing protean career. Boundaryless career is also measured through two dimensions namely organizational mobility preference and boundaryless mindset. This paper is organized as follows: next section presents definitions of the protean and boundaryless career perspectives and their related dimensions. Personality aspects based on the Big five model is also described. Then we will match personality traits to the career attitudes to construct our main question of the study. The research sample and data collection methods are then discussed, followed by a presentation of the research results, the research discussion, and the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Protean and Boundaryless Careers

Within the realm of changing work environment, protean and boundaryless careers have emerged as the symbols of the new career (Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2012). The protean career centers on Hall's, 1976, 1996, 2002 conception of psychological success resulting from individual career management, as opposed to career development by the organization (Briscoe et al., 2006). Briscoe and Hall (2006) have characterized the protean career as involving both values-driven attitudes and self-directed attitudes toward career management. It means that individuals who hold protean career attitudes are intent upon using their own values versus organizational values to guide their career. In addition, they take an independent role in managing their vocational behavior. In contrary, an individual who did not hold protean career attitudes would be more likely to borrow external standards, instead of internally developed ones, and be more likely to seek external direction and assistance in behavioral career management instead of being more proactive and independent. Thus protean career attitudes measure self-directed career management and values-driven predispositions (Briscoe et al., 2006).

A person with a boundaryless career attitude navigates the changing work landscape by enacting a career characterized by different levels of physical and psychological movement. Boundaryless career include psychological as well as physical mobility (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Briscoe et al. (2006) operationalized the boundaryless career along two dimensions: Organizational mobility preference and boundaryless mindset. Organizational mobility preference is defined as the interest in remaining with a single (or multiple) employer(s)" and boundaryless mindset is conceptualized as one's general attitude to working across organizational boundaries. Therefore, boundaryless career attitudes measure boundaryless mindset and organizational mobility preference. While the reviewed literature show some overlap between protean and boundaryless career attitudes, Briscoe et al. (2006) view these two career attitudes as independent yet related constructs. That is, a person could display protean attitudes and makes independent, inner-directed choices, yet not prefer crossboundary collaboration. In contrast, a person could have a boundaryless mindset, yet rely on one organization to develop his or her career.

2.2. The Big Five Personality Model

Personality is the dynamic and organized set of characteristics that creates a person's characteristic pattern of behavior, thoughts, and feeling. Traits are categorized into three types: cardinal trait, central trait and secondary trait and are known to play a key role in organizational behavior (Allport, 1961). Personality, defined as behavioral tendencies, is conceptualized as the Five-Factor Model (FFM) or Big Five which represents a broad description of the human characteristics of extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The components of Five-Factor Model of personality and their probable relationship with career attitudes are described below.

- High openness to experience individuals tends to be curious, flexible, receptive to ideas, seek novelty and explore the environment (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Because these individuals are drawn to novelty, we expect that they prefer organizational mobility rather than building a relationship based on the interactions with one organization.
- Conscientious individuals tend to strive for achievement and are dutiful, self-disciplined, hardworking, and reliable (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This factor evaluates competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation (Rubenzer & Faschingbauer, 2004). Because conscientious individuals are more responsible and hardworking, we theorize that they will be more highly to keep close contact with organization career developing mechanisms.
- Individuals who are more neurotic tend to have large mood swings, poor emotional control, and experience negative affect, stress, and anxiety (Costa & McCrae, 1992). High neuroticism individuals are usually poor at handling interpersonal differences and because of low emotional stability are less likely to initiate developmental relationships with others (Wu, Foo, & Turban, 2008). Therefore, we predict that neurotic individuals will have less tendency to boundaryless career.
- High agreeableness individuals are warm, trusting, cooperative, and helpful and show empathy (Wu et al., 2008). It refers to point such as sympathetic, kind, forgiving, appreciative, trusting, softhearted, modest, and considerate (Rubenzer & Faschingbauer, 2004). It seems that such characteristics are less related to self-directed attitudes.
- Extraverted individuals tend to be warm, outgoing, positive, sociable, and with a high energy level and tend to be comfortable interacting with others (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Thus, because highly extraverted individuals handle social situations well, we expect extraversion employees to be more self-directed and with boundaryless inclination.

Extensive research investigates the effects of personality aspects on a variety range of attitudes and behaviors. For example research indicates that personality influences social network characteristics (Bozionelos, 2003), job instability (Wille, Fruyt, & Feys, 2010), organizational commitment (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012) and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). However, little insight exists in how personality impacts career success. Thus, we extend this research and investigate the relationship between personality aspects and protean/boundaryless career attitudes. Our main study question is: which personality traits could be considered as the antecedents of protean and boundaryless career attitudes?

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedure

The data was collected from 500 personnel working permanently in one of the subsidiaries of National Iranian Oil Company located in Tehran, Iran. The respondents participated in the survey through answering a questionnaire on the organization's intranet. From these 500 employees, 346 personnel answered the questions and send it back to the authors. 47 questionnaires were excluded because of being incompletes, so 299 completed questionnaires were considered. Females comprised 33.7% of the respondents. The average age of participants was 42.50 years old ($SD=8.61$) ranged from 22 to 64, with an average work experience of 9.60 years ($SD=6.14$) ranged from 1 to 32. In addition, 60.42 % of participants had bachelor degree, 30.8% had master or Ph.D. degree and 8.78% had college education.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Protean Career Attitudes

Protean career attitudes were measured using the Protean Career Attitudes Scale presented by Briscoe et al., (2006). Eight items measured self-directed career management. Sample items are "Ultimately, I depend upon myself to move my career forward" and "Overall, I have a very independent, self-directed career." Six items measured the values-driven career orientation. Sample item are "What I think about what is right in my career is more important to me than what my company Thinks" and "I'll follow my own guidance if my company asks me to do something that goes against my values". A 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used to indicate the extent of agreement with each item.

3.2.2. Boundaryless Career Attitudes

Boundaryless career attitudes were measured using the Boundaryless Career Attitudes Scale by Briscoe et al., (2006). Eight items measured the boundaryless mindset. Sample items are "I enjoy working with people outside of my organization" and "I like tasks at work that require me to work beyond my own department". Five items measured the organizational mobility preference. Sample items are "I prefer to stay in a company I am familiar with rather than look for employment elsewhere." (Reverse scored) and "I like the predictability that comes with working continuously for the same organization" (Reverse scored). A 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used to indicate the extent of agreement with each item.

3.2.3. Big Five Personality Traits

The Big Five personality traits were measured using the 44 items in The Big Five Inventory by John & Srivastava (1999). Sample items are "I am always prepared" for conscientiousness, "I feel comfortable around people" for extraversion, "make people feel at ease" for agreeableness, "I often feel blue" for neuroticism and "enjoy hearing new ideas" for openness to experience. Respondents rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each phrase on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Since original protean and boundaryless career scales and Big Five personality traits questionnaire were constructed in English, these scales were translated into Farsi. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven Iranian employees from the organizations by the author to ensure an accurate interpretation of the items.

4. Results

4.1. Reliability and Validity Tests of the Scales

The validity of the three scales was tested using factor analysis. 14 items of the protean career attitudes scale, 13 items of boundaryless career attitudes and 50 items of Big Five personality traits scale were factor analyzed using principal axis factoring and Varimax rotation. $KMO=.87$ for the protean career attitudes scale, $KMO=.81$ for the boundaryless career attitudes scale and $KMO=.91$ for the Big Five personality traits scale indicated that the correlation matrixes were suitable for factor analysis. Table 1 provides the loadings and t-values of the measurement model. The results show that all items significantly load on their corresponding factors at $p<0.001$ (standardized loadings are greater than 0.5 and t-values are greater than 1.96). In sum, the factor analyses demonstrate that the translated scales performed as expected and yielded satisfactory results. In addition the reliability for each factor is also presented in table 1 (Cronbach α exceeding 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability for all cases).

Table 1. Results of the factor analysis and reliability

scale	factors	Number of items	Standardized loading range	t-value range	Cronbach α
Protean career attitudes	self-directed career management	8	0.62-0.79	4.52-8.82	0.76
	values-driven career orientation	6	0.59-0.68	2.34-6.17	0.83
Boundaryless career attitudes	boundaryless mindset	8	0.82-0.92	7.38-8.69	0.83
	organizational mobility	5	0.76-0.83	6.58-8.96	0.70
Big Five	conscientiousness	9	0.67-0.72	6.83-8.12	0.91

personality traits	agreeableness	9	0.73-0.89	8.46-9.71	0.92
	neuroticism	8	0.67-0.76	4.67-6.51	0.88
	openness to experience	10	0.57-0.86	7.83-8.65	0.84
	extraversion	8	0.64-0.86	6.48-9.11	0.83

4.2. Data Analysis

In order to answer the main question of the study that is to discover the relationship between personality traits and protean and boundaryless career attitudes, Pearson correlation coefficients were used. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations between the study variables. As shown in table 2, the correlation revealed that agreeableness trait was negatively related to self-directed career management and values-driven career orientation. Openness to experience and extraversion traits were positively related to self-directed career management, values-driven career orientation, boundaryless mindset and organizational mobility preference. Conscientiousness and neuroticism did not demonstrate a significant relationship with any of the protean and boundaryless career attitudes. In addition there were significant relationships between personality traits themselves. Extraversion was positively related to agreeableness and openness to experience and was negatively related to neuroticism. Openness to experience was positively related to conscientiousness and negatively related to neuroticism. Neuroticism was negatively related to conscientiousness and agreeableness and finally, agreeableness was positively related to conscientiousness.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients among the study variables

Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. self-directed	3.78 (0.62)	-								
2. values-driven	3.91 (0.67)	0.51**	-							
3. boundaryless mindset	3.25 (0.51)	0.43**	0.52**	-						
4. organizational mobility	2.69 (0.86)	0.29**	0.31**	0.41**	-					
5. conscientiousness	3.43 (0.61)	0.24	0.05	-0.11	-0.09	-				
6. agreeableness	3.95 (0.51)	-0.31*	-0.42*	-0.04	-0.08	0.45**	-			
7. neuroticism	2.85 (0.74)	0.07	0.10	-0.013	-0.08	-0.32*	-0.51**	-		
8. openness to experience	3.12 (0.67)	0.24*	0.31*	0.63**	0.46**	0.21*	0.91	-0.14*	-	
9. extraversion	3.69 (0.52)	0.41**	0.37**	0.22*	0.19*	0.11	0.16*	-0.21*	0.45**	-

N=299, * p< 0.05, ** p< 0.01

5. Discussion

The results of this study have important implications for understanding employees' new career orientations as well as the impact of personality on it. People are different according to their personality traits and the results of this study demonstrated that the difference in personality traits do affect on career orientation. Specifically, high agreeable individuals incline less to protean career orientation and in contrast, extroverted and open to experience people tend to follow protean and boundaryless careers more. These findings also have implications for human resource management functions. In employee selection it may be more effective for organizations to select individuals with less organizational mobility preference in areas that require a higher amount commitment to stay in organization. Agreeable people are more suitable for these positions and extroverted and open to experience people may not be very effective in these kinds of situations. Unlike these cases, some positions like boundary spanners in organizations need people who are more willing to interact with other people or organizations. Extroverted and open to experience people who have more boundaryless mindset could be suitable choices for these positions. In addition, in career management activity, human resource experts should consider the differences between employees in order to determine their career. Some people with extroverted and open to experience personality are less willing to let the organization manage their career alone. In such cases an effective career management could be done by considering individual tendencies and values. A solution for effective career management of people with protean and boundaryless career orientation might be job enlargement. Although they probably favor job enrichment, due to their increasing need for autonomy.

References

- [1] Allport, G. (1961). *Pattern and Growth in Personality*. NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- [2] Barrick, M., & Mount, M. (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance: A Meta-Analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 44, 1-26.
- [3] Bozionelos, N. (2003). Intra-organizational network resources: Relations to career success and personality. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 11, 41-66.

- [4] Briscoe, J., & Hall, D. (2006). protean careers: Combinations and implications. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69, 4-18.
- [5] Briscoe, J., Hall, D., & DeMuth, R. (2006). Protean and boundaryless careers: An empirical exploration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69, 30-47.
- [6] Çakmak-Otluoğlu, K. (2012). Protean and boundaryless career attitudes and organizational commitment: The effects of perceived supervisor support. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, article in press, doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2012.03.001.
- [7] Costa, P., & McCrae, R. (1992). NEO-PI/NEO-FFI professional manual. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- [8] De Filippi, R., & Arthur, M. (1994). The boundaryless career: A competency-based perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15, 307-324.
- [9] De Vos, A., & Soens, N. (2008). Protean attitude and career success: The mediating role of self-management. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73, 449-456.
- [10] Eby, L., Butts, M., & Lockwood, A. (2003). Predictors of success in the era of the boundaryless career. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 24, 689-708.
- [11] John, O., & Srivastava, S. (1999). *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*. NY: Guilford Press.
- [12] Panaccio, A., & Vandenberghe, C. (2012). Five-factor model of personality and organizational commitment: The mediating role of positive and negative affective states. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 80, 647-658.
- [13] Rubenzer, S., & Faschingbauer, T. (2004). *Personality, Character & Leadership in the White House*. Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc.
- [14] Segers, J., Inceoglu, I., Vloeberghs, D., Bartram, D., & Henderickx, E. (2008). Protean and boundaryless careers: A study on potential motivators. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73, 212-230.
- [15] Sullivan, S., & Arthur, M. (2006). The evolution of the boundaryless career concept: Examining physical and psychological mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69, 19-29.
- [16] Wille, B., Fruyt, F., & Feys, M. (2010). Vocational interests and Big Five traits as predictors of job instability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 76, 547-558.
- [17] Wu, P., Foo, M., & Turban, D. (2008). The role of personality in relationship closeness, developer assistance, and career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73, 440-448.