Boundaryless and protean career attitudes

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International Workshop: Career Success - Approaches from Economics and Psychology

Nuremberg, December, 3/4, 2009
Institute of Employment Research
Theoretical background (I)

- Substantial changes in today’s work environment
  - Flattened hierarchies, decreased job stability, higher mobility demands, ...
- The “new” career perspective receives more and more attention (e.g., Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006; Rousseau, 1995)
  - Responsibilities to career progress from organizations to individuals
  - Emphasis on individual’s freedom and growth
Theoretical background (II)

- The rise of new organizational careers requires new ways of viewing careers
- Two key concepts were developed:
  - Protean career (Hall, 1976; 2004)
    - Focuses on achieving subjective career success through self-directed vocational behavior
    - Focuses on crossing both physical and psychological borders
- Briscoe et al. (2006) developed a scale for measuring protean and boundaryless career attitudes
- Relationship between the protean and boundaryless career models:
  - Protean and boundaryless career attitudes are independent yet related constructs
Research focus

Two perspectives:

■ the “new” career researchers (e.g. Briscoe et al., 2006) focus on the impact of protean career attitudes on subjective career success
■ career success researchers (e.g., Feldman & Ng, 2007) suggest an impact of protean and boundaryless career attitudes also on objective career success

Study objectives:

Empirical investigation of the impact of the protean and boundaryless career attitudes on subjective and objective career success; important for career counseling

Theoretical integration of research on ‘new’ careers (Briscoe et al., 1995) with career success research (e.g., Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005)
The "protean" career attitude:

- Protean comes from "Proteus" a Greek sea-god
- Is a synonymous for being flexible, adaptive, changeable
- Hall (1976): careers in which individuals adjust themselves to changing environments by rapidly changing their shape
The “new” career attitudes (II)

The “boundaryless” career attitude:

- People with a boundaryless mindset “navigate the changing work landscape by enacting a career characterized by different levels of physical and psychological movement” (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006, p. 9)
- Enjoy working on projects with people from different organizations
- Are enthusiastic about engaging in new experiences and situations outside the organization
Previous research – protean attitudes

Quantitative empirical research is scarce:

**Positive associations with subjective career success:**
- Career satisfaction
- Other-referent subjective success
  (e.g., Briscoe, 2004; Briscoe, Water, & Hall, 2005; Gasteiger, 2007; DeVos & Soens, 2008)

**Inconclusive findings for objective career success**
- Salary
- Promotions
  (e.g., Briscoe, 2004; Gasteiger, 2007)
- Proactive personality (Briscoe and Hall, 2005) – objective success (Ng et al., 2005)
To our knowledge no empirical studies on boundaryless career orientations and subjective and objective career success

**Indirect support from career success research:**
- Interorganizational mobility tends to be positively related to objective career success (e.g., Feldman & Ng, 2007), not necessarily to subjective career success
- Change only when significant pay raise occurs
- Increase of human capital
Hypotheses: subjective career success

PROTEAN

Values-driven career orientation

Self-directed career management

Subjective career success

BOUNDARYLESS

Organizational mobility preference

Boundaryless mindset

+ H1a

+ H1b
Hypotheses: objective career success

- Values-driven career orientation
- Self-directed career management
- Organizational mobility preference
- Boundaryless mindset

Objective career success

+ H2a
+ H2b
Empirical study

Procedure:
- Online-survey within a large engineering and producing company in Germany

Sample:
- $N = 116$ employees
- 63.9% male, $\bar{\text{age}}: 32.86$ years ($SD = 7.08$)
- 79.3% had a university degree
- $\bar{\text{working hours per week}}: 42.62$ hours ($SD = 3.72$)
- Job tenure: $\bar{\text{years}}: 6.44$ years ($SD = 7.20$)
Measures

Career Attitudes:
Protean and Boundaryless Career Attitude Scale
(Briscoe et al., 2006; Gasteiger, 2007)

- **Self-directed**: e.g., "I am responsible for my success or failure in my career" (α = .83)
- **Values-driven**: e.g., "What’s most important to me is how I feel about my career success, not how other people feel about it" (α = .65)
- **Boundaryless mindset**: e.g., "I would enjoy working on projects with people across many organizations" (α = .78)
- **Organizational mobility preference**: e.g., "If my organization provided lifetime employment, I would never desire to seek work in other organizations" (α = .75)
Measures

- **Objective career success:**
  - **Salary:** annual salary before taxes; from no salary to more than €100,000 (zero to 11)
  - **Promotions:** number of promotions during their career

- **Subjective career success:**
  - **Career satisfaction:** career satisfaction scale (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), e.g. “I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals”
  - **Other-referent career success: comparison with co-workers** (cf. Abele & Spurk, 2009)
Preliminary findings – Confirmatory factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>$\Delta \chi^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta df$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One factor (all items on one factor)</td>
<td>951.76</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>364.34</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two factors (boundaryless and protean)</td>
<td>756.26</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>168.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four factors (as expected by the scale)</td>
<td>587.42</td>
<td>319</td>
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$\rightarrow$ Four-factor solution is the best

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<tr>
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<th>$SD$</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Self-directed career management</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Values-driven career attitude</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.40**</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Organizational mobility preference</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Boundaryless mindset</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24*</td>
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$\rightarrow$ Small to medium correlations between the factors
## Key Findings – subjective career success

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<th>Career Satisfaction</th>
<th>Other-referent subjective career success</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
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<td><strong>Step 1: control variables</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>gender$^a$</td>
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<tr>
<td>age</td>
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<tr>
<td>working hours</td>
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<td><strong>Step 2: protean and boundaryless</strong></td>
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<td>self-directed career management</td>
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<td>organizational mobility preference</td>
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<td>boundaryless mindset</td>
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N=116. *p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001. $^a$Gender is coded as 0 = male, 1 = female.
## Key Findings – objective success

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Summary

- **Protean career** explains variance in subjective career success
  - Those people craft their career according to their own terms (cf. Briscoe et al., 2006)
  - Fits well to emphasis of subjective perspective among “new” career researchers
- **Boundaryless career** explains variance in objective career success
- Integration of career success research and research on “new” careers – broadens the scope!

**Are the “new” career attitudes successful?**

- Yes:
  - Self-directedness and organizational mobility preference are important
    - Match with key requirements of contemporary work conditions?
  - Future research: replication of findings, moderators/mediators

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Thank you for your attention!

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