

## **Protean Career Orientation: Link with Subjective Career Success & Proactive Career Management Behaviours**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship of two dimension of Proactive Orientation (PCO) i.e., Self-directed Career Management and Values-driven Career Attitude as predictors of Subjective Career Success and to study the relationship between PCO and Proactive Career Management Behaviours. Data were collected from 57 working professional within the age range of 25 to 48 years. The results showed that protean individuals experienced higher levels of subjective success. They also reported proactively engaging in a number of different career management behaviours in comparison to those people who were low on PCO. The present study has important implications which have been discussed and conclusions regarding the relevance of PCO for career success are drawn.

**Introduction** As recent economic, technological and social changes increasingly shape the world of work, the career landscape is also growing more and more dynamic. Research scholars have also noted a marked shift in the fundamental nature of careers. The traditional career, once built within the confined of one or two organizations and completely guided by the organization, is giving way to independently created and self-directed livelihoods and autonomous career management. A dramatic rise in such unique careers has ignited interest in investigating more contemporary career types, one of which is the protean career orientation

**Protean Career Orientation:** The term protean stems from the Greek work Proteus and is a synonym for being flexible, adaptive and changeable. It was concept introduced by Hall in 1976 to capture the changing career landscape and a shift to people choosing career pathways that involve more freedom and growth as well as self-determination.

Protean career has been defined by Briscoe & Hall (2006) as “a career in which the person is (a) values-driven in the sense that the person’s internal values provide the guidance and measure of success for individual’s career; and (b) self-directed in personal career management – having the ability to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands.” Careers of people with a protean career attitude tend to be shaped by their internal values and beliefs instead of overall organizational or societal values. They also tend to self-directed and pursue their careers based on their goals they have defined for themselves instead of conforming to expectations that others have from them. People who are high on protean career orientation use their personal identity as a guide for their career decisions and become the architect of their own career path. Such individuals emphasize continuous learning, resilience, personal responsibility, and autonomy.

Having a protean career orientation and managing one’s own career development has found to be associated with several work outcomes such as job & career satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment and turnover intentions (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009) as well as several positive psychological outcomes including both career and life satisfaction as well as enhanced self-efficacy and well-being (King,2004).

**Subjective Career Success:** Career success is defined as "positive psychological or work-related outcomes one has accumulated as a result of one's work experiences". Career success can be both subjective and objective. Subjective success is an individual's positive evaluation of his/her career. According to Hall (2002), individuals with protean career attitudes strive for psychological success. In a study conducted by Gasteiger in 2007, it was

found that self-directed career management component of protean orientation is a significant predictor of career success. Empirical studies demonstrating the relationship between the values driven career attitude and career success are even fewer. Some other studies in this area have found correlations between protean career orientation and other career-relevant variables. For example, in a study conducted by Briscoe et al. (2006) positive associations were found between both components of the protean career attitude scale and proactive personality. Based on conceptual considerations and previous findings, it is hypothesized that both the dimensions of PCO i.e., self-die values-driven career attitude and self-directed career management will be positively related to subjective career success.

#### **Proactive Career Management Behaviours:**

A notion prevalent in protean careers is that every individual is primarily responsible for managing his or her own career. Career management is a process through which people specify their strengths, interests, career goals, and actively pursue those goals through strategic action. It is the proactivity that employees show with respect to managing their careers. To successfully navigate their contemporary career landscape, people must engage in such career management behaviours and take control over their career development. Since studies have shown that people with a strong protean career orientation tend to be more proactive when it comes to their career, it can be suggested that they would engage in more career management behaviours to achieve their personally valued goals. They would engage more in making key decisions to foster career growth and take strategic actions for their development. A criticism of current research on the PCO is that it has focused primarily on career attitudes, not on work-related behaviour.

#### **The present study:**

The aim of the present study is twofold. First, the study aims to shed light on the relationship between both the dimensions of protean career orientation (self-directed career management

and value-driven career attitude) with subjective career success. The second objective of the study is to examine the extent to which people with a strong PCO engage in proactive career management behaviours.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Hypotheses:**

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a positive significant relationship between Self-directed Career Management and Subjective Career Success

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a positive significant relationship between Values-driven career Attitude and Subjective Career Success

**Hypothesis 3:** Participants high on PCO will report engaging in more proactive career management behaviours

##### **Sample:**

The sample consisted of a total of 57 working men and women who were selected using the purposive sampling technique. The participants had an average professional experience of 7.39 years. On average, participants were 34.86 years old with a range from 25 to 29.

##### **Measures:**

###### **Protean career attitude:**

Protean career attitudes were measured using the Protean Career Attitudes Scale developed by Briscoe et al. (2006). Eight items were used to measure selfdirected career management (e.g., "I am responsible for my success or failure in my career") and six items were used to assess the values-driven career orientation (e.g., "What's most important to me is how I feel about my career success, not how other people feel about it"). Responses were given on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (to little or no extent) to 5 (to a great extent). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the self-directed career management scale & the values-driven career attitude scale is 0.83 and 0.64 respectively (Attached in Appendix 1).

###### **Subjective career success:**

Subjective career success was assessed using the Career Satisfaction Scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990). The scale consists of five items (e.g.,

“I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals”). Which employees’ rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) (Attached in Appendix 2).

**Proactive career managing behaviours:**

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they proactively engage in career management behaviors and they answers were rated on a 3-point rating scale (1- never, 3- occasionally and 5- A Great Deal). Items were adapted from Stumpf et al.’s Career Exploration Survey (Attached in Appendix 3). The scale has a strong internal consistency ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**DATA ANALYSIS:**

In order to carry out the analysis, the obtained data were subjected to regression analysis in SPSS 16.0 software. Multiple regression analysis was used to predict the variance accounted for by the predictors (self-directed career management and values-driven career attitude) in the outcome variable (subjective career success).

**Results**

Multiple regression analysis allows us to predict the values of the dependent variable based on its association with known values of other two or more predictor variables. In this

study, multiple regression analysis was considered a fitting statistic to evaluate whether the independent variables i.e., self-directed career management and values-driven career attitude were predictors of the dependent variable i.e., subjective career success.

Correlational analyses were carried out to examine relationships among the study variables. There was a significant positive correlation between the Subjective Career Success and Selfdirected Career Management ( $r = .761, p < .01$ ) as well as between Subjective Career Success and Values-driven career attitude ( $r = .778, p < .01$ ) (Table 1).

As it can be seen from the table, the results of the multiple regression indicated that the three predictors explained 78.8% ( $R^2 = .788$ ) of the variance in the outcome variable and that the model was a significant predictor of Subjective Career Success [ $F = 77.062, p < .001$ ]. Analysis also revealed that both the predictor variables, Self-directed Career Management ( $B = .381, p < .01$ ) contributed significantly to the model (Table 2).

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between the Predictor Variables & the Outcome Variable**

Particulars	M (S.D)	1	2	3
Subjective Career Success	16.96 (6.61)	--		
Self-directed Career Management	24.84 (2.98)	.761**	--	
Values-driven Career Attitude	19.88 (7.31)	.778**	.599	---

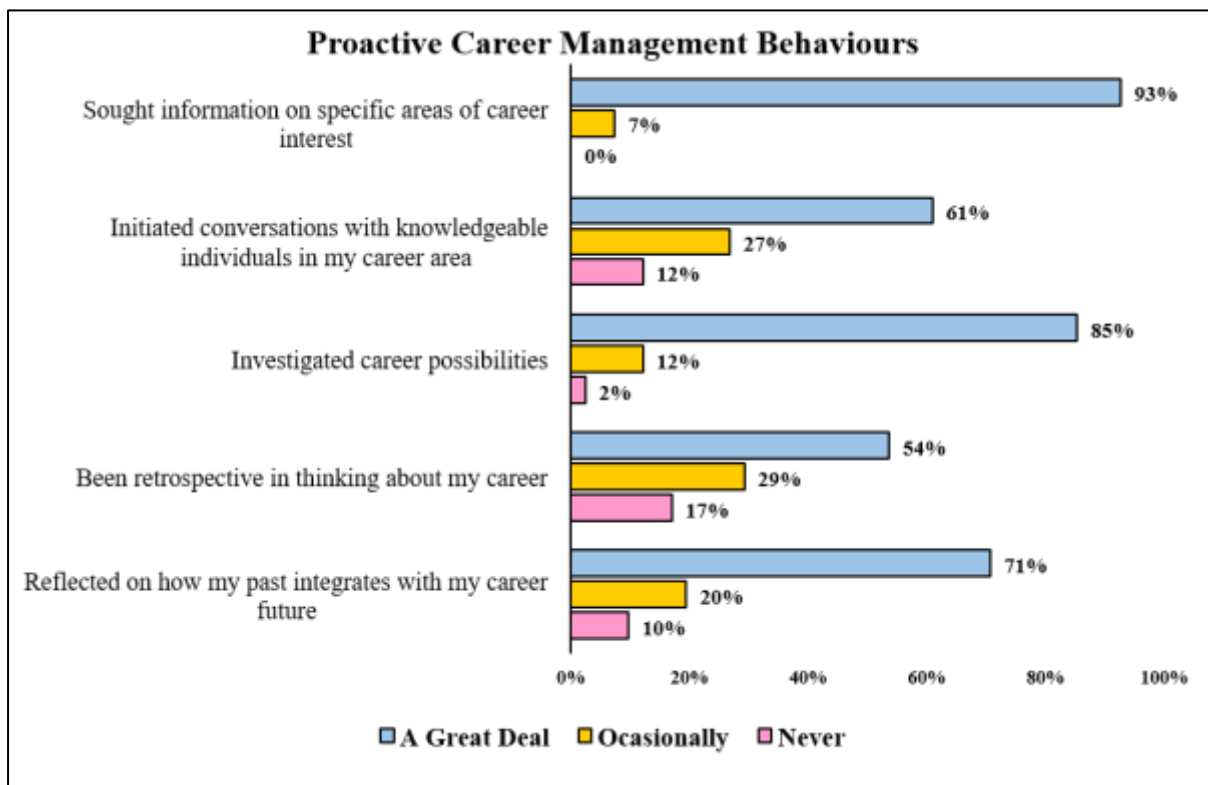
\*\*p < .01

**Table 2 Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Subjective Career Success (n =57)**

Particulars	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Model Summary		
	B	SE	B	T	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F
(Constant)	-1.529	6.575		-0.971	0.741	0.731	77.062***
Self-directed Career Management	0.381	0.072	0.460	5.310**			
Values-driven Career Attitude	0.455	0.078	0.503	5.809**			

\*\* p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

**Graph 1 Graph representing the extent to which participants high on PCO who engage in career management behaviours**



From the graph, it is visible that the that sample of people high on protean career orientation are more prone to engaging in proactive career management behaviours which indicates a positive relationship between the two.

### Discussion

The aim of the study was examine the relationship between protean career orientation and subjective career success.

The first hypothesis stated that there is a positive significant relationship between Self-directed Career Management and Subjective Career Success. From the results presented in Table 1, it can be seen that this hypothesis has been accepted (B = .381, p this suggests that people who are high on self-directed career management reported higher levels of subjective career success. This supports the idea that with protean career attitudes actively strive for career success by translating their goals into concrete actions to manage their career. These findings are consistent with a few

other studies which have been conducted in this area. For example, De Vos & Soens(2008) in their study found that protean career attitude is a significant predictor of subjective career success. Similarly, Gasteiger (2007) in a study of 621 German professional found that self-directed career management dimension of protean career orientation was positively associated with career satisfaction.

The second hypothesis stated that there is a positive significant relationship between Values driven career Attitude and Subjective Career Success. From the results, it can be seen that this hypothesis has also been accepted (B= .455, p<-01). This finding suggests that since people high on value-driven career attitude try to guide their careers according to their own standards and values, they experience higher level of career satisfaction. Very few empirical findings have been reported which have studied the relationship between values-driven Career Attitude and subjective career success.

However, one study with consistent findings is that of Gasteiger (2007) who found a correlation between the values-driven career attitude and different types of career success.

The third hypothesis stated that Participants high on PCO will report engaging in more proactive career management behaviours. From graph 1, it is clear that this hypothesis has been accepted. Participants who have a high protean career orientation tend to proactively engage in career management behaviours including investigating career possibilities and researching about their different career interested. This is because individuals with a strong PCO prefer to take control over their careers and they tend to participate more in career management activities to build career capital and gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic business environment. Similar findings were reported by (De Vos & Soens, 2008) in his study in which high PCO was significantly related to career management behaviours like career planning and exploration.

#### **Implications of the present study:**

Findings of the present study enrich our understanding of how protean career orientation is positively related to relevant career outcome. These suggests that it can be beneficial for organizations to develop career interventions and programs that can help strengthen employees' PCO. Since our findings also indicated that high PCO is associated with proactive career management behaviors, organizations can arrange workshops that help employees identify their core values and help them initiate proactive career planning. Companies can also promote a self-directed and values driven approach to career management through career development training, job redesigning and internal job postings. Such steps can create more diverse career experiences and strengthen a protean career orientation in the workplace. Hence, career support by the organization that actively engages employees in the management of their own career is important.

#### **Limitations & directions for future research:**

The study is not devoid of limitations. Firstly, data collection involved the utilization of self-report measures. Such measures tend to be susceptible to inaccurate responding as they rely on the subjective experiences and personal beliefs and perceptions of respondents. Second, this study has a cross sectional design and the common method bias is a possibility due to all the variables being collected at a single point. Longitudinal studies can better clarify the issue of causality between career attitudes and career success. Third, due to time constraints only quantitative research method was adopted. A mixed method approach, wherein qualitative techniques were also used could have helped gain deeper insights into protean career attitudes can prove to be more useful in the future.

Findings of the current study open several avenues for further exploration and deepened investigation. In the future, relationship of PCO with subjective career success can also be analysed for a more thorough analysis, interviews with participants can also be conducted to understand their career aspirations and how they correlate with their protean attitudes.

#### **Conclusion**

The present study contributed to the growing body of work in protean career attitude by examining the relationship of a protean career orientation relates with subjective career success. The findings showed strong positive relationships between both the dimensions of PCO with career successes. In addition, high PCO also indicated greater likelihood of engaging in proactive career management behaviors.

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### Appendix 1

Protean Career Orientation (Briscoe & Hall,

2005) 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

Self-Directed Career Management

1. I am responsible for expanding my career-related skills and knowledge

2. It is my responsibility to take the initiative to investigate my career options

3. I am responsible for my career development

4. I control the direction of my career

5. It is up to me to find or create opportunities for career progression

6. I am personally accountable for how my career develops Values-Driven Career Attitude

7. My career is guided by the opportunity to achieve personally meaningful values.

8. I judge my level of career success based on whether I achieve my own personal values and ideals

9. My personal principles and ideals motivate the important decisions in my career

10. It is important that my career helps me fulfill my life values.

11. I derive career success from achieving the personal standards I set for myself, not the standards set by my organization or society.

12. My career is driven by my need to achieve my values

### Appendix 2

Subjective Career Success (Greenhaus et al., 1990) 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree 1.

I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career

2. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals 3. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income

4. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals advancement

5. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills

### Appendix 3

Proactive Career Management Behaviors (Stumpf et al., 1983) To what extent have you done the following in the past 6 months?

1 = Never, 5 = a great deal

1. Reflected on how my past integrates with my career future
2. Been retrospective in thinking about my career
3. Investigated career possibilities
4. Initiated conversations with knowledgeable individuals in my career area
5. Sought information on specific areas of career interest,