

The Influence of Demographic Variables on Lecturers' Protean Careers Orientation

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the influence of age, level of education and gender on two dimensions of the protean career orientation: values-driven attitude and self-directed behaviour. The results, based on 582 university lecturers, showed that age was a significant predictor for the values-driven attitude while educational level was a significant predictor for the self-directed attitude. Gender was significant for both values-driven attitude and self-directed attitude. For both these dimensions, female lecturers scored higher than male lecturers, indicating that women were more intent on using their own values (versus organisational values) to guide their careers (values-driven) and possessed a self-directed attitude towards career management. The results of this study provided a further understanding of the factors that influence protean careerists. Furthermore, both research and managerial implications associated with values-driven attitude and self-directed attitude were discussed.

Keywords: Protean career, lecturers, self-directed, values-driven

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Any remaining errors or omissions rest solely with the author(s) of this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, an individual's career was typically defined as "a succession of related jobs, arranging in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence" (Wilensky, 1960, p. 554). Career success in the traditional career was based on frequent upward mobility (Reitman & Schneer, 2003) and monetary rewards (Hall, 1996). Employment in the organisation was based on the notion of "career service" of security of tenure and lifelong employment (Gardner & Palmer, 1997), and promotion was based on seniority and length of service (Selby, 1993). Employees were expected to be committed, loyal and trusting to their organisation in exchange for a sense of belonging, competent management and opportunity for input (Maguire, 2002). However, organisational loyalty and commitment which was emphasised in traditional jobs are no longer important in today's careers since organisations are unable to pursue long-term relationships with their employees.

Today's societal changes in the work environment, such as rapid technological advancement (i.e. information technology), flattened hierarchies and decreased job stability due to financial meltdowns have eliminated employees' opportunities to pursue a career within a single organisation during their lifetime (Volmer and Spurr, 2011). The changes in the working environment are due to the profound shift in the context of employment, such as pressures brought about by the globalisation of economies, increased workforce diversity (Bryant and Yarnold, 1995; Sullivan, 1999), increased mobility of capital and the integration of markets (Morris, Yaacob and Wood, 2004). In such a volatile economic environment, employees experience career transitions in their pursuit of career advancement as their employment paths no longer depend on a single firm. This phenomenon resulted in the rise of job losses and a decline in job stability over the past few decades (Bansak and Raphael, 2006; Farber, 2005; Kalleberg, 2009). Due to such changes, lifelong employment can no longer be expected and stable career paths are now less likely to be encountered (Dalton, 1989). Instead, employees are encouraged to pursue a more self-interested career (Maguire, 2002).

The decline of traditional organisational careers required new ways of regarding employment. Today, careers have shifted away from the traditional sense of the late 1980s, to one which is more "Protean" (Hall, 1996). A protean career is an individual's mind-set about his/her career and is characterised by relationships that are driven by the individual rather than the organisation (Hall and Moss, 1998). Protean careerists define career success in terms of psychological success rather than individual success, such as pay or promotions, and are further based on individually defined goals (Hall, 1996; 2002).

Research on the protean career is currently at the formative stage. Although the study of protean careers have gained much interest in the organisational literature as one of the popular career perspectives in recent decades (Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth, 2006), there is still limited empirical research to support surrounding theoretical propositions. For example, while Ng et al. (2008) discovered gender differences in the protean orientation, other studies have failed to specify gender differences (e.g. Agarwala, 2008; Vigoda-Gadot & Grimland, 2008). As suggested by Briscoe et al. (2006), a more comprehensive empirical approach is required for the protean career since this new concept has yet to be fully developed. Several authors (e.g. Briscoe et al., 2006; Eby, Butts and Lockwood, 2003; Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan and Arthur, 2006) called for more research that take into account gender, age, education level and other demographic factors which may influence an individual's protean career attitude. Hence, the objective of this study was to examine the influence of demographic factors such as age, education level and gender on university lecturers' protean career orientation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The decline of traditional organisational careers has led to new methods of examining careers. The protean career, first introduced by Hall (1976), was one of the latest perspectives that has emerged and is now popular in organisational literature. Protean careers centre on Hall's (2002) conception of psychological success resulting from individual career management which was described as individuals being highly adaptive and flexible, in addition to being self-directed, in the pursuit of psychological success (Greenhaus, Callanan and Drenzo, 2008). Moreover, a protean careerist values freedom believes in continuous learning and seeks intrinsic rewards from work (Hall, 1996; Hall and Moss, 1998).

The protean career is considered in terms of career orientation or attitude that individuals have regarding their jobs, and it consists of three components: cognitive (a set of beliefs individuals have of their careers), evaluative (a sense of what is considered to be a "good" or "bad" career) and behavioural (a tendency/predisposition to behave in certain ways) (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). The protean career emphasises the achievement of subjective success through two ways i.e. self-directed vocational behaviour and values-driven career attitude (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). Both self-directed vocational behaviour and values-driven career attitude elucidated the two dimensions of the protean career concept. Self-directedness refers to the individual taking an independent role in managing his/her career, while

values-driven refers to using one's own values in guiding his/her career (Briscoe et al., 2006). Hence, protean oriented individuals would adjust themselves to the changing environment by rapidly changing their behaviour through the self-directed career management and values-driven orientation (Hall, 1976). In addition, being values-driven meant that an individual measured his/her successes based upon his/her own values rather than the organisation's values. Protean career oriented individuals are motivated by their own internal values, upholding personal ideals or principles, rather than extrinsic motivators such as money and status of promotion. Hence, it has been concluded that individuals with the protean career attitude are motivated by achievement and personal growth while upholding their own values and principles (Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram and Henderickx, 2008).

Older workers, based on past research, were found to be less motivated by instrumental values such as financial security (Ryff and Baltes, 1976), and evaluated extrinsic work characteristics such as good pay, social interaction, promotion opportunities and generous holidays to be less important than younger workers (Warr, 2008). This may be explained by the fact that in the midlife transition period, older individuals start questioning what they truly want for themselves and others (Levinson, 1977) and are more likely to develop their own moral compass to guide their career or life (Sullivan, Martin, Carden and Mainiero, 2003). In addition, with age, people are increasingly able to resist social pressures regarding what to think and do, and become more self-determined according to their own values (Ryff, 1995). Older individuals are also found to uphold principles and values in comparison to their younger counterparts (Inceoglu, Segers, Bartam and Vloeberghs, 2008). Based on the above reasoning, it was hypothesised that:

H1 : There is a significant positive relationship between age and a values-driven career attitude.

Self-directed refers to the ability of the individual to adapt to the performance and learning demands of a career (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). The motivation for self-directedness, which is the need to achieve in order to adapt to the performance requirements, tends to decline with age (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). The reasons related to the decline of motivation for the self-directedness attitude are due to lower energy levels, habituation effects and a reduced expected value from the effort undertaken with increased age (Warr, 2001). From a self-directed perspective, older people are less motivated to attend trainings and to further develop themselves throughout their careers, which is essential in adapting to the learning requirements for each career cycle (Inceoglu et al., 2008; Maurer, 2001; Warr, 2001; Warr and

Birdi, 1998). This may be due to the fact that adults in the later stages of their careers are less driven by the need to prove themselves through achievements, such as competitive behaviour at work (Tolbert and Moen, 1998); therefore, they may be less motivated to attend training and development activities. This argument was supported by Heckhausen (1997) who found middle-aged adults (aged 30 years and above) and older adults (aged 40 years and above) were less achievement-oriented compared to younger adults. Another reason for this situation was due to the fact that older employees have already satisfied their basic needs in general, such as adequate pay, and have already competitively pursued work achievements during the younger phases of their careers (Heckhausen, 1997). As a result, it was hypothesised that the self-directedness attitude of an individual decreases with age. Thus:

H2 : There is a significant negative relationship between age and the self-directed career attitude.

In terms of the educational level and the protean career orientation, Churchill, Ford and Walker (1979) established that education levels influenced an individual's work attitude, presumably because an individual's expectations of rewards and responsibilities generally change as the education level increases. Moreover, it was established that individuals who were more educated were more likely to be voluntarily active in development activities. This conclusion was consistent with findings regarding required training (Warr & Birdi, 1998). Development activities may be in the form of company sponsored tuition refund schemes, company-subsidised employee development programs, conferences, seminars or workshops. The difference in learning motivation and learning confidence varied across individuals with various education levels. Individuals with higher education qualifications were more likely to have greater cognitive abilities and the ability to acquire additional knowledge than those with lower education qualifications. Hence, individuals with higher education qualifications tend to have increased learning motivation and confidence. In addition, researchers established that highly educated individuals tend to be increasingly motivated by intrinsic rewards, such as praise and recognition, than their less educated counterparts (Huddleston, Good and Frazier, 2002). It may simply be that individuals with higher education qualifications were generally more motivated by a sense of achievement. A substantial amount of empirical evidence stated that a significant relationship was present between human capital (knowledge, skills, education and work experience) and objective career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen and Feldman, 2005; Tharenou and Conroy, 1994). Therefore, it was expected that individuals with higher education qualifications

were more likely to undertake development activities (Warr & Birdi, 1998). This was hypothesised in the following:

H3 : There is a significant positive relationship between education level and the self-directed career attitude.

However, we do not expect education levels to influence the values-driven career attitude of individuals since there is no current explanation in the literature so far (Segers et al., 2008) to support the fact that respondents with higher education were more or less values-driven in their career attitudes. It was suggested that regardless of education levels, individuals are guided by their own values to a certain extent. Therefore, for hypothesis H4, it was proposed that:

H4 : There is no significant relationship between the education level and the values-driven career attitude.

This study postulated that significant differences between males and females would be present in the two dimensions of the protean career. Based on the gender socialisation theory, men and women have various perceptions due to their differences in attitudes and expectations (Smith and Rogers, 2000). Similarly, Rotundo, Nguyen and Sackett (2001) found that men and women perceived things differently because of their socialisation process and value system from prior experiences. Inceoglu et al. (2008) pointed out that women were more values-driven than men, whereby women tend to be motivated by their personal principles. Men were found to be increasingly motivated by traditional career achievements, such as monetary rewards, status and promotion, in comparison to women (Inceoglu et al., 2008). Hence, it was postulated that women tend to make career decisions based on their personal values, while men were more focused on achievement and personal growth. These findings also seem to suggest that women and men differ in their self-directedness and values-driven attitudes in their career development. Thus, it was hypothesised that:

H5 : There is a significant difference between men and women in their values-driven career attitudes.

H6 : There is a significant difference between men and women in their self-directed career attitudes.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents

Questionnaires assessing the demographic characteristics and protean career attitudes were distributed to 1,540 lecturers from public and private universities located in Peninsular Malaysia. By the end of the one month survey period, data was collected from 582 lecturers, 385 of whom were respondents from public universities and 197 were respondents from private universities. The response rate was 38%. Of the total respondents, 56 were from the faculty of science, 115 were from the faculty of humanities and social sciences, 270 were from the faculty of medical and health sciences and 141 were from the faculty of engineering and technology.

Measurement Items

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A contained items that measured the respondent's protean career orientation and Section B contained questions that elicited information on the respondent's demographic profile. The protean career scale by Briscoe et al. (2006) was used to measure the protean career attitudes of the respondents for this study. The protean career scale consisted of 14 questions that measured the two dimensions: the self-directed career attitude and the values-driven career attitude. There were 8 items that measured the self-directed career attitude and 6 items that measured the values-driven career attitude. An example of a self-directed item was "Ultimately, I depend upon myself to move my career forward" and an example for a values-driven item was, "What I think about what is right in my career is more important to me than what my company thinks." All 14 questions were measured using a five-point Likert scale that anchored from, 'To a little or no extent' (1) to 'To a great extent' (5).

RESULTS

Demographic Analysis

This study involved 582 lecturers from Malaysian public and private universities. Table 1 presents an overview of the demographic information of the respondents. The descriptive analysis revealed that 9 (1.5%) respondents were below the age of 25 years, 178 (30.6%) respondents were aged between 26-35 years, 277 (47.6%) respondents were aged between 36-45 years and 118 (20.3%) respondents were

Table 1 Profile of Respondents (N=582)

Demographic variable	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
Age:			
25 and below	9	1.5	1.5
26 – 35	178	30.6	32.1
36 – 45	277	47.6	79.7
46 and above	118	20.3	100.0
Gender:			
Male	321	55.2	55.2
Female	261	44.8	100.0
Highest Education Level:			
Masters Degree	102	17.5	17.5
Ph.D.	401	68.9	86.4
Professional Qualifications	79	13.6	100.0
Ethnic:			
Malay	338	58.1	58.1
Chinese	129	22.2	80.3
Indian	70	12.0	92.3
Others	45	7.7	100.0
Working Experience:			
Less than 1 year	26	4.5	4.5
1 – 3 years	59	10.1	14.6
4 – 6 years	52	8.9	23.5
More than 7 Years	445	76.5	100.0
Job Title:			
Lecturer/Senior Lecturer	434	74.6	74.6
Associate Professor	122	21.0	95.5
Professor	26	4.5	100.0
No. of Years in the Current University:			
Less than 1 year	28	4.8	4.8
1 – 3 years	30	5.2	10.0
4 – 6 years	190	32.6	42.6
More than 7 Years	334	57.4	100.0
Faculty:			
Science	56	9.6	9.6
Social Sciences and Humanities	115	19.8	29.4
Medical and Health Science	141	46.4	75.8
Engineering and Technology	270	24.2	100.0
University:			
Public University	385	66.2	66.2
Private University	197	33.8	100.0

aged 46 years and above. Of the total respondents, 321 (55.2%) were male while 261 (44.8%) were female. The results further revealed that 102 (17.5%) respondents had a Master's Degree, 401 (68.9%) respondents had a Ph.D., while 79 (13.6%) respondents had some form of professional qualification. Finally, 434 (74.8%) of the respondents consisted of lecturers/senior lecturers, 122 (21%) respondents were associate professors and 26 (4.5%) of the respondents were professors.

Reliability Analysis

A reliability analysis was conducted on the protean career scale to determine the reliability of the items used for this study. The reliability results, means and standard deviations for values-driven and self-directed career attitudes were presented in Table 2. The reliability results for self-directed career attitude and values-driven career attitude were 0.63 and 0.69, respectively. The measurement items were considered reliable since the Cronbach alphas fell within the acceptable range between 0.60-0.70, as suggested by Hair, Babin and Samouel (2003).

Table 2 Reliability, means and standard deviation scores

Description	No of items	Cronbach alpha	Mean	Standard deviation
Self-Directed Career Attitude	8	0.63	4.02	0.47
Values-Driven Career Attitude	7	0.69	3.76	0.57

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to test hypotheses H1 to H6. The regression results (refer to Table 3) for the values-driven career attitude as the dependent variable was significant ($F=11.62$; $p<0.05$) with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.052; indicating that 5.2% of the variance in the values-driven career attitude was explained by age, education level and gender. The regression model for the self-directed career attitude was also significant ($F=16.13$; $p<0.05$) with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.072, indicating that 7.2% of the variance in the self-directed career attitude was explained by age, education level and gender.

The ANOVA results in Table 3 showed that age significantly predicted the values-driven career attitude ($t=4.88$; $p<0.05$), thereby supporting hypothesis H1 which stated a significant positive relationship between age and the values-driven career attitude. However, there was no significant relationship between age and the self-directed career attitude ($t= 0.74$; $p=0.46$), and this result contradicted hypothesis

H2. It was seen from Table 3 that there was a significant positive relationship between education level and the self-directed career attitude of the lecturers ($t=4.90$; $p<0.05$). This result supported hypothesis H3 which stated a significant and positive relationship between education level and the self-directed career attitude. No significant differences, however, were found between education level and the values-driven career attitude of respondents ($t=-0.653$; $p=0.514$); thereby supporting H4. As seen in Table 3, gender significantly predicted both the values-driven career attitude ($t=3.35$; $p<0.05$) and the self-directed career attitude ($t=4.29$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, both hypothesis H5 and H6 were supported at the $p<0.05$ level.

Table 3 Regression analysis

Model (Values Driven)	Standardized coefficients	Sig.
Age	0.200	0.000
Education level	-0.027	0.514
Gender	0.136	0.001
F	11.621	0.000
Adjusted R Square	0.052	
Model (Self Directedness)	Standardized coefficients	Sig.
Age	0.030	0.459
Education level	0.199	0.000
Gender	0.172	0.000
F	16.134	0.000
Adjusted R Square	0.072	

The independent sample t-tests (refer to Table 4) revealed that females possessed a more self-directed career attitude ($M=4.12$) in comparison to males ($M=3.94$). Female lecturers also had a higher values-driven career attitude ($M=3.85$) compared to their male counterparts ($M=3.70$).

Table 4 Independent sample T-tests for gender

Values-Driven career attitude	Males	Females
Mean Values	3.695	3.848
Standard Deviation	0.574	0.545
t-Value	-3.328	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	
Self-Directed career attitude		
Mean Values	3.942	4.120
Standard Deviation	0.411	0.523
t-Value	-4.484	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

Overall, the results indicated that age and gender were significant predictors for the values-driven career attitude, while gender and education level were significant predictors for the self-directed career attitude.

DISCUSSION

This study embarked with the aim of assessing the influence of demographic variables on two dimensions of the protean career orientation: the values-driven career attitude and the self-directed career attitude. From the regression analysis, it was established that age had a significant and positive relationship with the values-driven career attitude. This result was consistent with previous studies (e.g. Briscoe et al., 2006; Ryff, 1995; Segers et al., 2008 and Warr, 2001) that suggested that age significantly correlated with the values-driven dimension of the protean career. A possible explanation may be related to the fact that older individuals were more self-determined and made career choices based on their own personal values compared to younger individuals (Ryff, 1995) since the motivation to uphold one's principles and values increases with age (Inceoglu et al., 2008).

It was confirmed that individuals were increasingly motivated to follow their own values as they grew older. However, this study was unable to demonstrate that age significantly influenced a person's self-directedness attitude. This finding was unexpected and suggested that increased age does not necessarily lead to a decline in the self-directedness attitude. This result seemed to contradict the findings by Heckhausen (1997) and Kanfer and Ackerman (2004). A possible explanation may be that lecturers, regardless of their age groups, need to constantly update their

knowledge in order to be good supervisors to their students and sound researchers. For this reason, lecturers, both young and old, would need to widely read and attend conferences to broaden their knowledge. Such activities were consistent with the self-directed career attitude which required an individual to learn on a continuous basis and to look for challenges in their work (Hall, 1996; Hall and Moss, 1998). Another possible explanation may be attributed to the fact that the majority of respondents in this study were between 36-45 years old and were at the Senior Lecturer or Associate Professor level. The ultimate aim for many academics is to become a full-fledged university professor. However, many universities in Malaysia now have certain criteria that must be fulfilled before lecturers are promoted to full-fledged professors. Hence, numerous academics would take charge of their own careers, knowing that they had to fulfil specific criteria before being considered for promotion to the next level.

The present study also discovered a significant relationship between education level and the self-directedness attitude. This suggested that more highly educated individuals would voluntarily undertake development activities; and this finding was also supported by Warr and Birdi (1998). The initiative to voluntarily undertake career development activities was consistent with the self-directedness dimension of the protean career, where self-directed individuals take an independent role in managing their vocational behaviour (Briscoe et al., 2006). Individuals with higher education levels were increasingly motivated towards intrinsic rewards compared to their lesser educated counterparts (Huddleston et al., 2002). The majority of respondents in this study (68.9%) had a Ph.D. qualification. The higher the education qualifications the individual had, the more likely they undertook in developmental activities; and this may account for the insignificant results between age and the self-directed attitude since it was unlikely that there would be a decline in learning motivation with increasing age.

This study also confirmed that gender was a significant predictor for both values-driven and self-directed career attitudes. This study found women to be more values-driven than men, and the results matched those observed in an earlier study by Segers et al., (2008). Men, in previous studies (Inceoglu et al., 2008; Sullivan and Arthur, 2006), were found to be more driven by money, status and promotions while women were less driven by such objective career successes and were more driven by their own principles and values. This result supported previous research into career attitudes which linked gender and career motivators. Interestingly, female lecturers were found to be increasingly self-directed in their career attitudes than male lecturers; and this contradicted the findings of Segers et al. (2008) who established that there were no gender differences in terms of the self-directed career attitude. A possible explanation for this result may be due to

the fact that female lecturers often have to fulfil work and non-work demands and as a result, they may choose to be “career self-agents” (Carbrera, 2009). As the primary caregivers, women generally have more non-work responsibilities than men (Carbrera, 2009) and this may cause female lecturers to take a more proactive role in finding numerous methods of working which fit their needs; thus forging their own career paths (for example, engaging in career strategies that would help them accommodate family responsibilities and progress in their careers).

In a protean career orientation, individuals were self-directed when they proactively managed their own careers (Cabrera, 2009), and the motivators linked to the self-directedness concept were the ability to adapt to performance requirements (i.e. achievements) and the ability to adapt to learning requirements (i.e. personal growth) (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). Since the mean value obtained from the independent sample t-test was higher for females compared to males in terms of self-directedness, this implied that females were more likely to display a higher learning and enhanced performance orientation than their male counterparts. It may also be assumed that female lecturers are more inclined to engage in a lifelong series of developmental experiences compared to male lecturers. In summary, these results displayed that women were more intent on using their own values (versus organisational values) to guide their careers (values-driven) and possess a self-directed attitude toward career management.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study had important implications for developing an understanding on the protean career. Most of what is known about careers is based on studies conducted in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Therefore, this study provided insight into the application of the protean career, a career theory developed in the West, in a non-Western context. This study also advanced the protean career theory by adding to the existing understanding on how demographic factors such as age, gender and education levels influenced the two elements of the protean career orientation; i.e. values-driven and self-directed career attitudes.

Another set of issues that had emerged from the results related specifically to managing the values-driven and self-directed career attitudes of academics. Firstly, the results of this study indicated that age played an important role in the values-driven career attitude and that university lecturers were increasingly motivated to follow their own values with age. Therefore, universities should help lecturers discover and be aware of their own personal values at an early stage of their careers, since the results of this study displayed that with age individuals tend to

become more motivated by their own values. Universities may also provide formal training and education to encourage positive values among lecturers since these values can be used to guide their career attitudes later on in life. Such training and educational opportunities may further assist in the alignment of organisation values with individual values.

Secondly, the more education an individual gains, the more self-directed they will be in terms of their career management. Therefore, universities will need to address their employees' career attitudes since they would be dealing with highly educated individuals, and provide organisational support that actively engages employees in the management of their own careers. This includes providing flexible key performance indicators (KPIs) that will allow lecturers to choose which area(s) they would like to excel in, such as teaching, research or consultancy; while developing a more tolerant culture that will allow lecturers to discover their own career identity.

Lecturers, especially women, who become self-directed, would also value opportunities that grant personal and professional development, enabling them to learn more about themselves and their work values. Furthermore, knowledge and skills facilitated by mentors and contacts would permit open and honest discussions regarding their careers. They may also appreciate career development strategies which promote multi-skilling and novel job assignments, such as cross-functional secondments. Universities may further encourage their male lecturers to be more self-directed in their career management by boosting developmental relationships, such as establishing platforms, which allow career dialogues with the head of departments, faculty deans, peers or career coaches. Furthermore, universities should provide information about future developmental opportunities through the use of electronic job boards.

Although the relationship between the self-directed attitude and organisational commitment was not examined in this study, self-directed attitude was found to significantly influence organisational commitment (Cakmak-Otluoğlu, 2012). Therefore, encouraging university lecturers to take responsibility in managing their own careers will most likely lead to a higher organisational commitment.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

Overall, this study was based on 582 lecturers from both public and private universities located in Peninsular Malaysia. Hypotheses in terms of age, level of education and gender were created to test their influence on the two underlying dimensions of the protean career: the values-driven attitude and the self-directed behaviour. A total of six hypotheses were created, of which five were supported.

Two limitations were identified in this study. For the first limitation, although this sample was reasonably large, caution need to be taken against generalisation when it comes to the findings. This study was conducted on a specific sample of respondents (i.e. academics) in one geographical area (Peninsular Malaysia); a natural progression of this work would be to analyse across different regions and industries. As pointed out by Sullivan and Baruch (2009), further research should be conducted to examine the potential differences in values-driven and self-directed career attitudes due to cultural and national differences. It would also be interesting to examine how factors such as organisational tenure, types of organisational culture and individual ethical ideologies influence self-directedness and values-driven attitudes. Future researchers may further examine how subordinates rate their supervisors who are values-driven and self-directed. It would be intriguing to assess whether values-driven supervisors make better leaders than self-directed supervisors. A second limitation was that the data were based on self-reported responses which may result in potential measurement error caused by common method variance (CMV) (Richardson, Simmering and Sturman, 2009). Hence, it was important to bear in mind the possible bias in self-reported responses. One method to reduce CMV, suggested by Richardson et al. (2009), was to use a longitudinal or multisource design or post hoc statistical techniques to detect and correct CMV.

This study established that the protean career attitude was linked to specific demographic variables and such information would provide useful insight in terms of career management strategies. Universities need to be aware of these influences and the specific nature of the protean career orientation in order to develop appropriate career strategies that will optimise the professional development of academics in their institutions.

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