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## The Relationship Between Protean Career and Career Satisfaction among Employees in Manufacturing Factory

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between protean career and career satisfaction among the employees of a manufacturing company in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. A total of 100 employees had participated in this study whereby data was collected using a set of questionnaires. The *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) was used to analyse the data by using the descriptive statistical analysis and Spearman correlation analysis. The results showed that the level of protean career and career satisfaction was high among the employees. In addition, there was a significant and positive correlation between protean career and the employees career satisfaction. This study suggests that Malaysian employers involve employees in the organizational career management process such as by providing a realistic career path and career development opportunities for the employees.

**Keywords:** Protean Career, Career Satisfaction, Career Success, Self-Directed Career Management, Values-Driven

### Introduction

Recent economic, technological, and social developments have significantly impacted organizational structures and mediated the psychological relationship between organizations and employees. As a result, there was a dramatic increase in career paths that crossed various inter-and intra-organizational boundaries (Arthur, 1994). This phenomenon has ignited interest in the protean career orientation because it can help individuals achieve fulfilment and well-being despite today's job uncertainty and complexity.

Hall (1976) introduced the concept of protean career by explaining the rise of self-managed professions led by the desire for personal fulfilment. The word protean is a synonym for versatility, adaptability and changeability. According to Greenhaus et al (2008), individuals with protean career are inclined to be self-directed in search of their psychological achievements. In other words, protean career is handled by the individual, not by the

organization. Briscoe and Hall (2006:8) described protean career as 'a profession in which the person is 1) values-driven in the sense that the inner values of the person provide motivation and measure of success for the profession of the individual; and 2) self-driven in personal career management – having the ability to adjust to the demands of performance and learning'.

On the other hand, career satisfaction represents a 'positive psychological or work-related results, or cumulative work-related achievements' (Seibert et al., 1999: 417). Career satisfaction has received a lot of academic attention for several years. The term career satisfaction has been used interchangeably with career success. According to Volmer and Spurk (2010), individuals with a protean career attitude record higher levels of subjective and objective career success. In other words, protean career attitude has the capacity to influence an employee's career satisfaction.

Although past studies have discovered the existence of a relationship between protean career and career satisfaction or career success (Kiong and Yin-Fah, 2016; Mustafa et al., 2019), studies on the relationship are found to be limited, particularly in the context of Malaysia (for example Wong et al., 2017, Wong et al., 2015; Chin et al., 2014; Gubler et al., 2013). Therefore, it was the aim of this study to further investigate protean career attitudes among Malaysian employees, as well as the extent to which it influences their career satisfactions.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives of the study are as below:

- I. To identify the level of protean career attitude among employees.
- II. To identify the level of career satisfaction among employees.
- III. To investigate the relationship between protean career and career satisfaction among employees.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Protean Career***

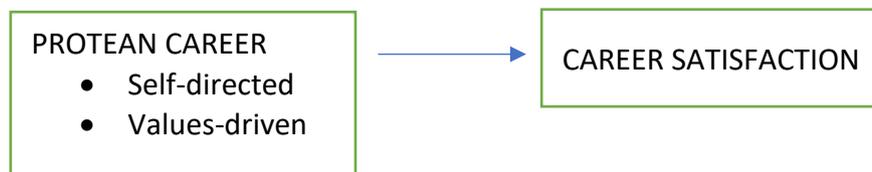
Protean career is an extreme type of boundaryless career coupled with strong internal career motives and success measures (Baruch, 2004). It requires a personal relationship with self instead of an individual or agency. The protean careerist, taking personal responsibility for their career growth, constantly 'refashions' themselves according to their personal desires and demands of the work world. The word 'protean' derives from the name of the Greek god Proteus, who would be able to change his form at will. Employees with protean career attitude value freedom and self-growth; and define job success in terms of psychological variables such as level of work satisfaction, self-realization, personal achievement, and self-fulfilment (Hall and Chandler, 2005). Briscoe and Hall (2006) clarified in a similar vein that a protean career illustrates two significant aspects which are values-driven and self-directed career management. The protean career has been described as "a process that is handled by the individual, not the organization". It is composed of all the different experiences of the individual in the areas of training, education, and work in many organizations, varies in the sector of employment, and others.

### **Career Satisfaction**

Career satisfaction is the positive psychological or career-related outcomes and accomplishments that result from one's work experience (Judge, et al., 1995). This is an important concept within organizational behaviour; because it represents an overall assessment of one's occupation and is the main goal of occupational management. Two different but quite similar conceptualizations were used in the research. The conventional approach has discussed the objective career performance, which relates to observable, measurable career results than others, such as income, employment level, and hierarchical status (Seibert et al., 2001). Additionally, subjective career performance reflects the assessment of an individual's career success (Judge et al., 1999; Seibert, 2006). This subjective evaluation is influenced not only by objective standards but also by internal variables such as individual levels of ambition, social interactions with others and perceptions of situational constraints involving prospects for advancement in one's chosen career (Arthur et al. 2005; Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; Wolff and Moser, 2009).

### **The Relationship between Protean Career and Career Satisfaction**

There are numerous studies over the years on the subject of protean careers and career satisfaction. These findings have revealed a positive relationship between these two variables. Research done by Woishi and Sultana (2019) found that protean career related positively to career satisfaction. It means a person can be satisfied with their job, irrespective of the amount payable (Woishi and Sultana, 2019). The protean career attitude reflects a personal agency feeling which makes a person to manage his or her own career and this, in turn, should advance career success feelings. Other findings by Zafar and Mat (2012) and Kiong and Yin-Fah (2016) revealed that protean career attitudes and career success are positively related to each other (Zafar and Mat, 2012). The following figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study.



### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study used a quantitative method which involved descriptive and correlation analyses. In the scope of this study, the independent variable was protean career and the dependent variable was career satisfaction. In order to measure these variables, a questionnaire proposed by Briscoe et al. (2006) protean career attitudes scale and career satisfaction scale (Greenhaus et al., 1990) were adopted. The respondents were required to rate each question derived using the 5-point Likert Scale.

In this research, non-probability sampling procedure was used to get the sample of respondents. This procedure was chosen as researcher was unable to obtain the size of the population from the chosen organization – a manufacturing company in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Therefore, convenience sampling strategy was used in this study. Convenience sampling is a form of non-random sampling in which study participants who meet certain practical criteria, such as ease of access, geographic proximity, availability at a particular time,

or willingness to participate in the study, are included for the purposes of the study (Etikan et al., 2016).

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used in this study to analyse and transform the collected raw data to valid and reliable information to provide findings for this study. This method also aids in developing answers to the research questions proposed earlier. Thus, to study the relationship between protean career and career satisfaction, both descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out. Descriptive statistics was conducted to measure the level of protean career among the respondents. The results from descriptive statistics were presented by using mean score, percentage, and frequency. Besides that, inferential statistics using Spearman correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between protean career and career satisfaction.

## Data Analysis

### Demographic Analysis

The following table 1 shows the respondents' demographic profile. In total 100 respondents have participated in this study. Majority of them are female (58%), between the age of 25-40 years old (70%), Indian (47%), married (33%), have 5 to 15 years of experience (67%), earning a monthly salary between RM3501 to RM4500 (38%), and majority of them have a Bachelor degree (45%).

**Table 1:** Demographic Analysis

Factors	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	42.0
	Female	58	58.0
Age	18 - 24	16	16.0
	25 - 29	32	32.0
	30 - 40	38	38.0
	> 41	14	14.0
Ethnicity	Malay	10	10.0
	Chinese	24	24.0
	Indian	47	47.0
	Others	19	19.0
Marital Status	Single	26	26.0
	Married	33	33.0
	Divorced	28	28.0
	Widowed	13	13.0
Working Experience	Below 5 years	22	22.0
	5 - 10 years	35	35.0
	10 - 15 years	32	32.0
	Above 15 years	11	11.0
Basic Salary Monthly	Below RM 2500	11	11.0
	RM 2500 - RM 3500	24	24.0
	RM 3501 - RM 4500	38	38.0
	RM 4501 - RM 5500	23	23.0
	Above RM 5500	4	4.0
Higher Academic Qualifications	SPM	10	10.0
	STPM/Matriculation/Diploma	32	32.0
	Bachelor's Degree	45	45.0
	Others	13	13.0

**Protean Career Attitude**

The first objective of this study was to identify the level of protean career attitude among the employees. Table 2 and 3 illustrate the overall mean values, frequency and percentage analysis on protean career attitude dimensions.

**Dimension 1: Self-Directed**

Table 2 demonstrates the findings of self-directed protean career dimension. In overall, the level of self-directed protean career is at high level which suggests the respondents strongly believe that they are responsible for their own career development. For instance, 63% respondents agreed that they have a very independent, self-directed career, 68% respondents believed that they have the freedom to choose their own career paths, 65% indicated that they are in charge of their own careers, and 70% believed that they depend on themselves to move their career forward. These results clearly show that the respondents demonstrated protean career attitude.

**Table 2:** Findings of dimension self- directed protean career scale

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Level
		f %	f %	f %	f %	f %		
1	When development opportunities have not been offered by my company, I've sought them out on my own.	0 (0.0)	10 (10.0)	29 (29.0)	30 (30.0)	31 (31.0)	3.82	High
2	I am responsible for my success or failure in my career.	2 (2.0)	13 (13.0)	26 (26.0)	35 (35.0)	24 (24.0)	3.66	Moderate
3	Overall, I have a very independent, self-directed career.	0 (0.0)	9 (9.0)	28 (28.0)	33 (33.0)	30 (30.0)	3.84	High
4	Freedom to choose my own career path is one of my most important values.	1 (1.0)	12 (12.0)	19 (19.0)	34 (34.0)	34 (34.0)	3.88	High
5	I am in charge of my own career.	0 (0.0)	13 (13.0)	22 (22.0)	34 (34.0)	31 (31.0)	3.83	High
6	Ultimately, I depend upon myself to move my career forward.	1 (1.0)	9 (9.0)	20 (20.0)	39 (39.0)	31 (31.0)	3.90	High
7	Where my career is concerned, I am very much "my own person".	1 (1.0)	10 (10.0)	23 (23.0)	35 (35.0)	31 (31.0)	3.85	High
8	In the past I have relied more on myself than others to find a new job when necessary.	0 (0.0)	12 (12.0)	18 (18.0)	41 (41.0)	29 (29.0)	3.87	High
	Total Average Mean Score						3.83	High

Note: 1-To little or no extent, 2-To a limited extent, 3-To some extent, 4-To a considerable extent, 5-To a great extent, f-frequency, %-percentage

**Dimension 2: Values-Driven**

Table 3 indicates the findings of values-driven dimension. In overall, the level of values-driven protean career is at high level. The result shows that 67% respondents agreed that they navigate their own career based on their personal priorities, 66% indicated that they follow their own conscience when the company asks them to do something that goes against their values, and 75% respondents agreed that what they think is right in their careers is more important than what the company thinks.

**Table 3:** Findings of dimension values- driven protean career scale

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Level
		f %	f %	f %	f %	f %		
9	I navigate my own career, based on my personal priorities, as opposed to my employer's priorities.	1 (1.0)	6 (6.0)	26 (26.0)	39 (39.0)	28 (28.0)	3.87	High
10	It doesn't matter much to me how other people evaluate the choices I make in my career.	1 (1.0)	7 (7.0)	30 (30.0)	30 (30.0)	32 (32.0)	3.85	High
11	What's most important to me is how I feel about my career success, not how other people feel about it.	2 (2.0)	10 (10.0)	25 (25.0)	38 (38.0)	25 (25.0)	3.74	High
12	I'll follow my own conscience if my company asks me to do something that goes against my values.	0 (0.0)	11 (11.0)	23 (23.0)	38 (38.0)	28 (28.0)	3.83	High
13	What I think about what is right in my career is more important to me than what my company thinks.	1 (1.0)	3 (3.0)	21 (21.0)	43 (43.0)	32 (32.0)	4.02	High
14	In the past I have sided with my own values when the company has asked me to do something I don't agree with.	0 (0.0)	11 (11.0)	16 (16.0)	45 (45.0)	28 (28.0)	3.90	High
	Total Average Mean Score						3.87	High

Note: 1-To little or no extent, 2-To a limited extent, 3-To some extent, 4-To a considerable extent, 5-To a great extent, f-frequency, %-percentage

**Career Satisfaction**

Table 4 illustrates the overall mean values, frequency and percentage analysis on career satisfaction dimensions by using descriptive statistic method. In overall, the level of career satisfaction is at high level. In fact, all items received high scores. 78% of the respondents

indicated that they are satisfied with the success that they have achieved in their careers, and 74% of the respondents are satisfied with the progress they have made towards meeting their goals for the development of new skills.

**Table 4:** Findings of career satisfaction

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Level
		f %	f %	f %	f %	f %		
1	I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.	0 (0.0)	10 (10.0)	12 (12.0)	40 (40.0)	38 (38.0)	4.06	High
2	I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals.	1 (1.0)	9 (9.0)	22 (22.0)	41 (41.0)	27 (27.0)	3.84	High
3	I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for income.	2 (2.0)	8 (8.0)	24 (24.0)	42 (42.0)	24 (24.0)	3.78	High
4	I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for advancement.	2 (2.0)	13 (13.0)	19 (19.0)	40 (40.0)	26 (26.0)	3.75	High
5	I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for the development of new skills.	2 (2.0)	10 (10.0)	14 (14.0)	41 (41.0)	33 (33.0)	3.93	High
	Total Average Mean Score						3.87	High

*Note: 1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree to some extent, 3-Uncertain, 4-Agree to some extent, 5-Strongly agree, f-frequency, %-percentage*

#### ***The Relationship between Protean Career and Career Satisfaction***

Table 5 shows the correlation analysis result between protean career and career satisfaction, as well as between each dimension of protean career and career satisfaction.

**Table 5:** Relationship between Protean Career and Career Satisfaction among Employees

Level of Protean Career Attitude	Career Satisfaction	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Directed Career	0.658**	0.000
Values-driven	0.662**	0.000
Protean Career	0.689**	0.000

*\*Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); n=50*

Based on Table 5, the findings demonstrated that there is a positive and significant relationship between self-directed career dimension and career satisfaction ( $r = 0.658$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There is also a positive and significant relationship between values-driven and career satisfaction ( $r = 0.662$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In overall, there is a positive and significant relationship between protean career and career satisfaction ( $r = 0.689$ ,  $p < 0.01$ )

### Discussion

The first objective of this study was to determine the extent of protean career attitude among Malaysian employees. The findings of this study revealed that the level of protean career in terms of self-directed protean career and values-driven protean career among the employees were high. This suggests that the employees take full responsibility of their own career growth or self-growth (Hall and Chandler, 2005). Besides that, this study also revealed a high career satisfaction among the respondents which indirectly implies that the respondents are satisfied with their career-related outcomes or accomplishment (Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom, 2005; Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; Wolff and Moser, 2009).

More importantly this study has found a significant and positive relationship between protean career and career satisfaction. This suggests that employees' career satisfaction can be influenced by their protean career attitude specifically self-directed and values-driven. This finding is supported by various past studies for instance (Volmer and Spurk, 2010; Woishi, and Sultana, 2019; Zafar and Mat, 2012; Enache et al., 2011; Vos and Soens, 2008; Lyons et al., 2015; Briscoe et al., 2012; Herrmann et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2015; Kiong and Yin-Fah, 2016; Mustafa et al., 2019; Sei and Dar, 2019).

The findings of this study are important as it not only proved that Malaysian employees demonstrate protean career attitudes, but it also revealed that employees are more likely to be satisfied with their careers when they are in control of their career path (self-directed protean career attitude). Besides that, employees too are more likely to navigate their career path based on their personal priorities, personal choices, personal values, and personal conscience (values-driven protean career attitude). Other than that, this study has shown that career satisfaction could be described in many ways including achievement, goal, income, advancement, as well as development of new skills.

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that Malaysian employers involve employees in the organizational career management process. It is crucial that employers provide a realistic career path for the employees, communicate the process and the criteria

for career advancement, as well as provides career development opportunities for the employees.

However, the findings of this study cannot be generalized as it involved a small sample of respondents in an organization. Future researchers may want to replicate this study in a different industry and with a larger sample size to further confirm the association between these variables. Moreover, this study has only investigated the linkage between the independent and dependent variable. Future studies may want to explore the link between demographic characteristics such as age, gender, academic background with protean career attitude and career success.

### Conclusion

In summary, this study has provided empirical evidence which supports the relationship between protean career and career satisfaction. In other words, employees' satisfaction towards the aspects of their careers could be influenced by their ability to manage their own career path, as well as by their ability to navigate their career based on their personal interests. This study has clearly shown that employees consider themselves responsible for their own career development and that career satisfaction could not only be measured in terms of tangible aspects such as monetary values but also other intangible and subjective aspects such as self-fulfilment, skill development etc. This posits a challenge for organization to provide career-related incentives and supports which aligns with employees' career goals and personal values.

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