



Protean and boundaryless career attitudes and organizational commitment: The effects of perceived supervisor support[☆]

K. Övgü Çakmak-Otluoğlu^{*}

Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Business Administration, Istanbul University, Avclar, Istanbul, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Despite the traditional sentiment that protean and boundaryless career attitudes indicate a decline in organizational commitment, little empirical evidence is available. The present study examined the relation of protean and boundaryless career attitudes to organizational commitment and whether the perceived supervisor support moderated these relationships. The results based on data from 380 employees demonstrate that organizational mobility preference is negatively related to all three dimensions of organizational commitment. Self-directed career management is positively related to affective and normative commitment and negatively related to continuance commitment, while values-driven career orientation is negatively related to normative commitment. Moreover, there is no significant evidence provided for a moderating effect of perceived supervisor support on the relationships between protean and boundaryless career attitudes and organizational commitment. Perceived supervisor support has only a main effect on affective and normative commitment.

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1. Introduction

There has been a significant change in the nature of careers over the last few decades (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Sullivan, Carden, & Martin, 1998). Situated within the realm of changing working environments, protean and boundaryless careers have emerged as the “symbols of the new career” (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 5). Despite their recent popularity in the careers literature, several authors argue that these career models need to be examined empirically (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Moreover, both the protean and boundaryless career models have been developed in the United States (Briscoe et al., 2006) and tested there as well as in Western Europe (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Enache et al., 2009; Gasteiger & Briscoe, 2007; Segers et al., 2008). The current study strives to move theory forward on protean and boundaryless careers by examining the relationships between protean and boundaryless career attitudes and organizational commitment. Additionally, the study takes place in Turkey, a non-Western context that allows us to expand our understanding of the global reach of these important theories.

Within the careers literature, there has been a traditional sentiment that protean and boundaryless career attitudes indicate a decline in organizational commitment (Sturges, Guest, & Davey, 2000; Sullivan, 1999). Without being tested empirically, it is still ambiguous whether employees with protean and boundaryless career attitudes are less committed to their organizations (Zaleska & Menezes, 2009). Consequently, this study addresses the research gap in the careers literature by examining the relation of protean and boundaryless career attitudes to organizational commitment.

While not the primary focus of the research, the Turkish context is an important moderating influence upon the studied phenomena. Turkish employees have been experiencing more transitions and insecure employment during their working lives and

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^{*} Fax: +90 212 590 4000.

E-mail address: ovgu@istanbul.edu.tr.

have traditional career paths only within the public sector or large organizations. In line with these developments, it can be said that career boundaries are shifting in Turkey.

1.1. Protean and boundaryless careers

The reviewed literature demonstrates that protean and boundaryless career models are sometimes used interchangeably as the two main dominant symbols of the new career (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Similarities between these models may contribute to their interchangeable use (Inkson, 2006). For instance, several authors emphasize some characteristics of protean career (e.g., personal identification with meaningful work; Mirvis & Hall, 1996, individual responsibility for career management; Brousseau et al., 1996) for conceptualizing the boundaryless career. Hall (2004) similarly states that the degree of mobility, which is strongly associated with boundaryless career, is high in protean career. Despite their similarities, Briscoe et al. (2006) found that the protean and boundaryless career attitudes are correlated yet distinct constructs.

The protean career is conceptualized as a career that is driven by the person, not the organization (Hall, 1976; 2004). Briscoe and Hall (2006) suggest that a protean career has two dimensions—self-directed career management and values-driven career orientation—which describe the protean career as an individual preference to control his/her career behaviorally and adequately meet his/her career needs. Hence, individuals who have protean career attitudes will guide the direction of their careers consistently with their own values, rather than the values of the organization (Briscoe et al., 2006; Hall, 2002).

The boundaryless career is defined as “a sequence of job opportunities that goes beyond the boundaries of any single employment settings” (De Filippi & Arthur, 1994, p. 307). Even though Arthur (1994) has noted that there are multiple meanings beyond this general meaning, the reviewed literature demonstrates that the boundaryless career is typically examined with regard to crossing organizational boundaries and is characterized by physical mobility (Inkson, 2006). Sullivan and Arthur (2006) generalize the boundaryless career to include psychological as well as physical mobility. Reflecting the psychological dimension of boundaryless career, Briscoe et al. (2006) operationalized the boundaryless career along two dimensions: Organizational mobility preference and boundaryless mindset. Organizational mobility preference is defined as “the strength of 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” (Briscoe et al., 2006, p. 33).

The reviewed literature shows that relatively few empirical studies examined the correlates of protean and boundaryless career attitudes. For instance, Briscoe et al. (2006) found that proactive personality, career authenticity, openness to experience, and mastery goal orientation correlated to both the protean and boundaryless career attitudes. In addition, De Vos and Soens (2008) found that career insight, perceived employability, and career satisfaction correlated to protean career attitudes. More empirical studies on the correlates/outcomes of these career models need to be done to enrich theory (Briscoe et al., 2006; Pringle & Mallon, 2003).

1.2. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is one of the most important concepts in the fields of management, organizational behavior, and human resource management (Cohen, 2007). Because of its links to turnover intentions and actual turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008). Meyer and Allen (1991) have conceptualized organizational commitment as a three-component model (affective, continuance, and normative commitment). According to Meyer and Allen’s (1991) organizational commitment model, affective commitment reflects employees’ emotional attachments to the organization, continuance commitment reflects employees’ perceptions of costs of leaving the organization, and normative commitment reflects employees’ feelings of moral obligation to remain with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996). In other words, the three components of commitment are widely seen as three different constructs (Meyer, Stanley, & Parfyonova, 2012).

The reviewed literature suggests that the protean and boundaryless career models imply the trend of diminishing organizational commitment (Zaleska & Menezes, 2009). Hall (2004) has said that the key attitude of organizational commitment in traditional career is replaced by the key attitudes of work satisfaction and professional commitment in the protean career. Sullivan (1999) emphasizes that individuals with boundaryless career attitudes will be less committed to their organizations. Despite the popularity of associating the protean and boundaryless career models with potentially decreased organizational commitment, there is little empirical research on this issue. Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009) carried out the only research that explored this assumed relationship and did not establish empirical support. They therefore suggested analyzing additional variables that may impact the relationships between protean and boundaryless career attitudes and organizational commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009). One such variable may be supervisor support. Because several authors found that supervisor support was strongly related to organizational commitment (Ko, Price, & Mueller, 1997). Moreover, it should be noted that changing working environments and nature of careers have led to changes in psychological contracts between organizations and employees (Hall & Moss, 1998). Employees exchanged loyalty for job security under the old contract, while employees exchanged performance for employability under the new contract (Hall, 1996; Rousseau, 1995). Thus, fostering organizational commitment is a challenging issue both to the organization and the employee. In line with these changes, supervisor support may help organizations to maintain organizational commitment by enhancing the career development and employability of employees (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005). Particularly taking into account that employees with protean and boundaryless career attitudes seek out opportunities to develop new competencies in different areas (Briscoe & Hall, 2006), the importance of supervisor support seems reasonable. Thus, the present study attempts to investigate whether the relationships between the protean and boundaryless

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