Traditional to Boundaryless Career: Redefining Career in 21st Century

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Abstract

In the last two decades, increasing attention has been placed on self managed careers along paths other than the linear progression of responsibility and pay in the organisation. The ‘protean career’ and ‘the boundaryless career’ are the two most influential concepts relating to such careers. The traditional definitions of career and career success have been redefined in 21st century due to economic pressures and consequent organizational restructuring. The aim of this research paper is to understand the context in which the individual employee has started responding to the changing nature of work from a social and psychological perspective. Individuals are reacting to disappearing career norms by shifting their focus away from organizational careers and toward specific professional and work roles. Periods of relative career stability are decreasing because “individuals are constantly in a state of becoming, of moving between and through various roles and their attached identities and relationships” . The paper has highlighted this dominant issue through various sections, namely the background and the emergence of boundaryless careers and protean careers. The context in which individuals develop their careers and the meaning they attach to the different activities in which they engage are regarded as key elements in understanding self managed careers. The boundaryless and protean career concepts have made valuable contributions to explain such careers, but the sources of meaning driving self managed international careers are still largely unexplored.
Keywords: Protean career, the boundaryless career, organizational restructuring, social and psychological perspective.

1. Introduction
The ‘protean career’ argues that being self driven and moving in consonance with one’s own values is necessary for continuous personal transformation and to achieve psychological success (Hall 1976, Hall & Chandler 2005, Sargent & Domberger 2007). In such terms, protean career actors constantly revaluate their relationship with the organisation (Hall 2002). This stance versus the organisation is also reflected in the ‘boundaryless career’ which emphasises freedom and agency, and is in short, anything, but the traditional career designed by the organisation (Arthur & Rousseau 1994, Cadin, Bailly-Bender & de Saint-Giniez 2000, Sullivan & Arthur 1999). Boundaryless careers can trespass physical boundaries (e.g., organisational or national boundaries) and psychological boundaries (e.g., defying organisational norms for personal reasons) (Sullivan & Arthur 2006, Peiperl & Jonsen 2007). Individuals combining the characteristics of both protean and boundaryless careers are suggested to be in the best position to adapt to changing contexts and achieve psychological success (Briscoe & Hall 2006). Being the alternative to organisational careers, the boundaryless and protean career concepts refer to a wide range of possible careers. For that reason, clean categorisations between ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ careers (e.g., Dowd & Kaplan 2005) have been criticised in favour of constructionist approaches (Cohen, et al. 2004, Young & Collin 2004). Recently, dimensions for both concepts have been defined, leading to a typology that has begun to be used in empirical research (Briscoe & Hall 2006, Segers, Inceoglu, et al.)

The Organisation as a parent: an obsolete maraphor
Traditionally, careers were thought to evolve within the context of one or two firms and were conceptualized to progress in linear career stages (Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957). Success was defined by the organization and measured by promotions and increases in salary (Hall, 1996a). Now however, the tall, multi-layer, functionally organized structures characteristic of many large companies have changed (Miles & Snow, 1996). Firms have downsized to become more flexible in response to environmental factors such as rapid technological advancements (Coover, 1995; Freeman, Soete, & Efendioglu, 1995; Howard, 1995) and increased global competition (Rosenthal, 1995). Crocito (1998) observed an over-riding impression that the traditional, a ‘multifaceted phenomenon involving navigation across employers, market confirmation, one’s knowledge and choices, and connections to networks of a social and professional nature’.

The Paradigm Shift:
There has been three salient paradigm shifts which is a major challenge for the management perspectives in the 21st century.
Firstly, there is a growing focus towards occupational or professional commitment rather than organizational loyalty for the sake of job stability. Today one can see that there is an increased thrust on enriched learning, continuous proactive skill enhancement and networking activities. Due to the increased professional relationships among the individuals there is a rapid increase in job mobility. Herein lays the challenge of retention of workers as well as the tacit information of the organization. Added to this, there is a decreasing loyalty towards the organizations for which the employees work for. Naturally the challenge now lies in their building up of general competencies that can be utilized in various firms rather than concentrating upon company-specific requirements.

Secondly workers are now aiming for satisfaction related to intrinsic rewards whereby there is a deeper fulfilment of personal values and ideals. Managing a boundaryless career requires an individual seek out and contract personally fulfilling work. Thus, in today’s dynamic scenario the employee’s psychological contract is not done with the company but with one’s own inner, spiritual self where the candidate strives to reach the self-actualized level ultimately.

Finally, the dependence from the firm to one’s own abilities is a major stride that today’s worker has taken. For career associated to a single organization, the employees were trained and developed by the organizational initiatives in return for long-term association with the firm. The organization offered firm specific training, usually at specific points in the career. Ironically such programs started diminishing with the worker’s increasing age. Thus, workers were further bound to the organization as they lacked transferable skills and marketability. The organization is only keen to invest on the core employees who they feel will stay for long term. So the mantle lies on the workers who must accept responsibility and seek opportunities for training and development by their own initiatives. Self career management is the key to sustaining the contingent business environment today. Workers moving across occupational and organizational boundaries need transferable skills today. Careerists need to focus on skills that will increase their marketability.

Research on the boundaryless career suggests that organizations prefer generalist over specialist skills because of increased team-based approaches and new technologies. Also to change jobs, candidates require good contact base and negotiation ability. More so because of the growing trend of de jobbing, the candidates are today centring their activities on projects rather than specific jobs. Also, Individuals are looking for works that are personally meaningful and this requires a considerable amount of reflection and self-evaluation. Individuals need to balance the work and non-work dimensions that are available to them. Individuals also need to seek out organizational cultures that match their values and lifestyles. The needs to prioritize crucial aspects of life and balance activities are paying vital roles today in the individual’s career. There is a relationship between Subjective Career and Behavioral Science Theories.
Table 1: Four Properties of the Subjective Career as Reflected in Behavioral Science Theories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Science Theories</th>
<th>Duality with Objective Career</th>
<th>Interdependence with Objective Career</th>
<th>Perspective on Time</th>
<th>Multiple Dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hall (1976, 2002)</td>
<td>The subjective career involves values, attitudes, etc., the objective career observable career choices.</td>
<td>Individual perception links between attitudes and behaviors and work-related experiences.</td>
<td>A series of learning mini-stages through which people adjust to the world and develop their identities.</td>
<td>Outcomes of the development of career sub-identities about both “who I am” and “what I do.”</td>
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<td>Social Psychology</td>
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<td>Krumboltz (1979)</td>
<td>The objective career reflects past experiences, the subjective career genetic and cognitive factors.</td>
<td>The interaction of everyday learning experiences with people’s cognitive responses to those experiences.</td>
<td>Sequences of successive learning experiences that shape subsequent career behavior.</td>
<td>A variety of social roles through which individual’s experiences</td>
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<td>Sociology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hughes (1937, 1997)</td>
<td>The objective career reflects institutional roles, the subjective career people’s adjustment to those roles.</td>
<td>The interplay between a person’s social roles and conceptions of the self, as work experience unfolds.</td>
<td>A series of status passages or temporally-staged shifts from one social role to another, throughout life.</td>
<td>Social roles, through which people exercise influence, take responsibility and receive recognition.</td>
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2. Conclusion
Organisations can benefit from the deeper understanding that career stories provide. Accommodating employees’ goals and motivations (even non work related) can be an effective way of retaining key employees. At the same time, stories can facilitate mutual understanding and future collaboration with more mobile employees. Furthermore, as self managed international careers increase, hiring foreigners already expatriated will become a readily available and potentially beneficial option for global staffing. The present study suggests that the practice is beneficial for the individuals as well, as it provides them with freedom to manage their careers according to what is meaningful for them. In the context of India, virtually there has been no research till date, hence future implications directs substantial empirical research to develop a feasible career framework and supportive models because models are highly contextual. Finally, the meteoric rise of the agile career entrepreneurs who have been setting new standards of success within their work sphere leads us to the inevitable question: Are the organizations ready to incorporate them within their folds to nurture them, develop them and reinforce them in customized patterns?

References