

# Careers of professional staff in Australian and UK universities

A mixed methods pilot study

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This article confirms the reliability of a protean and boundaryless career attitudes scale, tested in a pilot study. Additionally, it summarises the results of this study into the career attitudes of professional staff in Australian and UK universities. A mixed methods approach was taken using a survey consisting of both closed questions on a 5-point Likert type scale, and an open text question that asked for respondents' career stories. The convenience sample consisted of 19 staff from Australia and 12 from the UK. The findings suggest that professional staff create a hybrid approach to managing their career, showing aspects of protean, boundaryless and traditional career attitudes and that there are no significant differences between the career attitudes of these staff in Australia and the UK. There is a clear need for further research to test these results, which could be used to inform universities' human resource strategies.

*Keywords: Professional staff, career theory, protean, boundaryless, hybrid, mixed methods*

## Introduction

Universities, as large businesses in their own right, are required to have effective academic and business management to ensure successful teaching, research and business-related outcomes. With massification and increased regulation there are considerable numbers of non-academic staff working in Australian and UK universities. For example, in Australia in 2015 there were 65,739 non-academic staff or 55.4 per cent of the total population; in the UK the figure for 2014/15 was 205,500 or 51 per cent of the total population (Department of Education and Training, 2016; Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2016).

According to the HESA in the UK, non-academic staff include 'managerial, professional and technical' staff

which are commonly identified with different names including administrators, professional (services) staff, or academic-related staff. In this paper, I use the term professional staff to encompass the wide range of activities these staff undertake ranging from, for example accountants, registrars, human resource professionals, and librarians. In 2014/15 these staff numbered 95,870 or 23.7 per cent of the total staff population in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2016; there is no number for this cohort of staff from Australia). These staff are typically at least graduates (or are required to hold equivalent qualifications or have equivalent experience, for example accounting or human resource qualifications) who hold positions of varying authority and responsibility in their universities. However, limited empirical research has been carried out on the careers of these staff as it is suggested

they are 'unseen and unsung' (Eveline, 2004, p. 138). This is a significant oversight, as research suggests that staff who are engaged, are satisfied with their job, and embedded in their organisation are more committed to their organisation and potentially more productive, with the positive effect of reduced staff turnover (Martin & Roodt, 2008; Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). The literature that does exist suggests that there are a number of antecedents that contribute to their affective organisational commitment including remuneration, promotion opportunities, learning and skills development and utilisation, and the work itself (Meyer *et al.*, 2002).

A report by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in the UK (LFHE, 2010, p. 6) on a study of 12,000 higher education staff, found that professional staff were attracted to the sector by the 'opportunity to use skills/experience', 'a friendly work environment', 'career security' and 'salary'; senior staff also placed emphasis on sector values. Once recruited, they were committed to staying within their organisation and agreed to a 'high' extent that higher education offered a worthwhile career. They reported that their current salary could induce them to leave, as could an opportunity to develop their career. In Australia, a report published in 2012 (Strachan *et al.*, 2012) which surveyed 32,983 general staff (which includes clerical and technical staff) in 19 universities, showed that 75 per cent of respondents 'strongly or somewhat agreed' that they were satisfied with their job. However, 42 per cent said there was a 5-50% chance that they would leave their job voluntarily in the next 12 months; 63 per cent were satisfied with career opportunities at either their own university or in the sector and 54 per cent said that within the next five years they would like to be in a higher-level role.

This paper explores career theory applied to professional staff in Australian and UK universities through the use of a multi method survey instrument. Baruch (2014) and Briscoe *et al.* (2006) highlighted the need to develop applicable measures of the contemporary career and highlighted the importance of validation studies. Although Baruch's (2014) work was critical of Briscoe *et al.* (2006) 14-item measure that split protean career attitudes into two factors - self-directed and values-driven - he did note that the items captured the nature of the protean career attitude. It is critical to test for evidence of internal reliability and validity of constructs and this paper describes the testing of Briscoe *et al.* (2006) two-factor protean and boundaryless (explained below) constructs through a pilot study, before embarking on a larger study, on university professional staff in Australia and the UK.

## Literature review

The traditional organisational career was arguably the major form of employment until the early to mid-1990s with employers (both private and public sectors) providing long-term employment and guaranteed benefits in return for high-commitment and high-productivity. Extensive economic changes in the 1970s and 1980s led to organisations downsizing and de-layering to reduce costs, with many shifting from a vertical to a more horizontal organisational design, with the perceived need to develop generalists, and not just specialists, in order to respond to instability and change (Kanter, 1977, p. 325; Lent & Brown, 2006; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). It has been argued that from the 1980s organisational design changed from the modern to the postmodern, which then needed to be reflected in new career models and major new conceptual models were developed based on constructivist approaches to career theory. That individuals constructed their own social realities was seen as the most important aspect of understanding people's decision-making processes and career stories (Nichols, 2007, p. 61; Sharf, 2013, p. 15). Two new conceptual models were developed to understand contemporary careers: protean and boundaryless.

### *The protean career model*

The protean career is both an attitude, and a process, which the individual, and not the organisation, actively manages. A person's career consists of all of their varied experiences including education and training, work history, changes in positions and sectors etc. The protean career focuses on intrinsic success resulting from individual decisions and the meanings given to the work rather than extrinsic organisational career achievements such as financial and hierarchical rewards (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2004; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). It centres on values-driven attitudes to employees' own careers rather than organisational requirements, and individuals showing high levels of self-directed vocational behaviour. The protean career also involves mobility, a whole-life perspective, developmental progression, continuous self-directed learning, autonomy, flexibility, and self-fulfilment (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Therefore, the first two hypotheses for the present study would be as follows:

- H1 Professional staff will show a self-directed career management attitude*
- H2 Professional staff will show a values-driven attitude to their career*

### ***The boundaryless career model***

The original theory of the boundaryless career viewed individuals as free agents – not bounded by one organisational career – but moving easily between organisations as well as careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 3-20) across varying industries, not all reliant on the traditional organisational employment contract. However, this original definition did not take account of whether these moves were voluntary or not, vertical or lateral, the duration, or if they were organisation- or self-directed (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). More recently boundaryless careers have been seen as dualistic, consisting of both psychological and geographical mobility (Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Segers *et al.*, 2008; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Geographic mobility, most easily understood, has been the most researched factor but has resulted in contested outcomes, due in part to not taking the above duality into consideration. Psychological mobility, which has been defined as ‘the perception of the capacity to make transitions’ (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006, p. 21) has been under-researched. Employees will vary in their attitude to working outside of their own organisation, which does not necessarily correlate with an intention to leave their current role to work for another organisation.

Boundaryless individuals are primarily motivated by intrinsic success but also by hierarchical success – albeit with more than one employer. Characteristics of this career type are: mobility, flexibility, the need for meaningful work, skill utilisation, work-life balance and fulfilling relationships across organisations, and at the same time not giving importance to organisational promotions and career paths (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006; Forrier *et al.*, 2005). It assumes that an individual’s career would be comprised of hierarchical and lateral moves, plateauing, periods outside of the labour market and career changes; they therefore require external marketability. This leads to the next two hypotheses:

*H3 Professional staff will show a psychologically mobile attitude*

*H4 Professional staff will show a geographic mobile attitude*

### ***Hybrid theory***

The two career theories outlined above have often been used interchangeably, due to the cross-over in identifiable factors, and the fact that the protean career attitude could of course result in multiple organisational contracts; additionally a person with a boundaryless attitude is also more likely to act in a protean fashion (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Not only have studies shown that protean

and boundaryless careers intersect, but that some individuals enact hybrid careers, which contain elements of traditional and contemporary careers (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). For example, Granrose and Baccili (2006) found that the majority of employees valued job security and upward mobility (traditional) but also training relevant both internally and externally (boundaryless) to the organisation and an open, trusting and mutually respectful work environment (protean). Previous research has shown that professional staff value job security and promotion opportunities (LFHE, 2010; Strachan *et al.*, 2012) so this leads to the final hypothesis:

*H5 Professional staff will show hybrid career attitudes*

## **Method**

The study utilised a cross-sectional survey design to collect quantitative and qualitative data via an online survey in May 2015. For this pilot study a convenience sample was used to gather a suitable number of responses quickly which could be achieved by exploiting the author’s LinkedIn connections (220). LinkedIn is a social media-networking site that allows colleagues to connect to each other in relation to work and professional interests; it was launched in 2003 and now has 300 million members worldwide (LinkedIn, 2015). It is widely used in higher education with most universities in Australia and the UK having a presence as well as the Australian and UK professional bodies for professional staff – the Association of Tertiary Education Managers and Association of University Administrators, respectively. Little research has been done on the use of LinkedIn as a sampling design, although one study did highlight that of all the social media platforms used (Facebook, Twitter, blog) and traditional media, LinkedIn had the lowest participant recruitment rate (Middleton *et al.*, 2014).

As this was a pilot study, a convenience sample was appropriate as data analysis would be used to test the reliability, internal consistency and construct validity of the survey items (de Vaus, 2002, p. 90; Zikmund *et al.*, 2003, p. 305-308, 396) and to explore the data responses, therefore 30 or more responses was considered adequate. Of these LinkedIn connections, not all would be appropriate as the population – or the participant identity – was specific, that of professional staff in Australia (Higher Education Worker level 7 and above; Fair Work Ombudsman, 2010) and the UK (salary spinal point 30 and above; University and College Union, 2001).

A new multi method survey instrument was constructed consisting of items measuring demographics such as age,

**Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the participants (n=31)**

	Australia	UK
Gender – Female	10	7
Gender – Male	9	5
Ethnicity	White/Caucasian n=17	White/ Caucasian =12
Median age range	50-59	40-49
Highest educational level	Professional qualification n=1	
	PhD n=2	PhD n=1
	High school graduate n=3	Masters n=8
	Masters n=6	Graduate n=3
	Graduate n=7	

gender, educational attainment, and ethnicity, and items relating to work environment such as salary, number of promotions, and employment terms. To ascertain the perceptions of professional staff of their careers, previously validated questions were used. Firstly, questions relating to aspects of protean and boundaryless careers, using a 5-point ratings scale were included (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006). The next section included items from a questionnaire by Raeder *et al.* (2009) to test employees’ needs from the organisation, based on psychological contract measures. The final career question was a free text box asking participants to relate their ‘career story’. The free text question was used to supplement the closed questions, to provide an area of exploration into this subject area and to triangulate the quantitative data (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p. 71). There were 34 responses; three of these were partial and were excluded from the analysis. There were then 31 full responses with 19 participants from Australia and 12 participants from the UK.

The quantitative survey data were analysed using SPSS v.22 and the qualitative data were analysed through manual coding, first using a number of a priori codes informed by the literature followed by emergent codes derived from the respondents’ stories (Barbour, 2008).

**Results**

**Instrument analysis**

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out on the protean career items, which agreed with the original analysis that the questionnaire items had internal reliability and clearly belonged to either of the two factors: self-directed career management (Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) =

**Table 2: The employment characteristics of participants (n=31)**

	Australia	UK
Contract – permanent	13	12
Contract – fixed term	6	0
Full time	16	11
Part time	3 (all female)	1 (female)
Median salary range (n=17)	\$105,000+	£50,000- 59,000 <sup>1</sup>
Employed in current position	<5 years n=9	<5 years n=11
	5-10 years n=6	10+ years n=1
	10+ years n=4	
Employed in current university	<5 years n=9	<5 years n=3
	5-10 years n=6	5-10 years n=4
	10+ years n=4	10+ years n=5
Intention to leave within 12 months	Yes n=5	Yes n=1
	No n=13	No n=11
	<i>1 invalid response</i>	
Are you considering applying for promotion or a higher graded job in the next 3 years	Yes n=10	Yes n=8
	No n=9	No n=4

*1 Roughly equivalent*

0.78) or values-driven attitudes, although question 13 (I navigate my own career based upon my personal priorities as opposed to my university’s priorities) was removed due to cross-loading to self-directed ( $\alpha$  = 0.76). CFA was carried out on the boundaryless mindset components, which confirmed that the items loaded onto psychological ( $\alpha$  = 0.90) or physical mobility preference ( $\alpha$  = 0.81).

**Demographic and employment data**

The demographic and employment characteristics of the participants are shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. It can be seen that the samples are skewed towards the older median age range, due, one would infer, to the LinkedIn connections of the researcher. The participants are mainly white/Caucasian, and just over 50 per cent were women (Table 1).

Table 2 shows key employment data for the participants. Thirty-two per cent of the participants in Australia were on fixed term contracts compared with 100 per cent of the UK staff being on permanent contracts. The majority of staff in both countries were in full-time employment

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the composite variables self-directed, values-driven, psychologically mobile and geographic mobile career attitudes (n=31).**

	<i>Self-directed</i>	<i>Values-driven</i>	<i>Psychologically mobile</i>	<i>Geo-graphic mobile</i>
Mean	4.15	3.81	4.24	3.65
Std. Deviation	0.55	0.60	0.57	0.74
Skewness	-0.46	-0.52	-0.28	-0.97
Std. Error of Skewness	0.43	0.43	0.42	0.42
Kurtosis	0.74	-0.14	-0.80	1.85
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.83	0.83	0.82	0.82
Minimum	2.60	2.33	3.00	1.40
Maximum	5.00	4.67	5.00	5.00

(specified as greater than 30 hours per week) and towards the top end of the salary scale, indicating middle to senior management positions. For example, 11 of the 17 respondents from Australia indicated their salary was above \$105,000 and nine of the 12 UK respondents indicated their salary was above £50,000. Staff in Australia reported that they had been employed both in their current university and in their current role for similar timeframes; whilst in the UK the participants had seemingly moved around within their universities more. Most staff had no intention to leave their jobs in the next 12 months although the majority did intend to apply for promotion within three years. Table 4 also shows that the majority of staff in both countries deem organisational loyalty, job security, opportunities for promotion, and opportunities for a career important.

Table 3 provides the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis data for the self-directed, values-driven, psychologically and geographic mobile career attitudes. A Shapiro-Wilk test for normality showed that the data come from a normal distribution.

**Career attitudes**

Research has shown that there are a number of organisational and individual characteristics that increase the likelihood of career success as defined by promotions - self-efficacy, job rotation, and learning agility (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2012; Dries, *et al.*, 2012; Karaevli & Tim 2006). The results from this study align with some of these findings, as it shows that professional staff exhibit self-efficacy, and prioritise job rotation and learning opportunities, career development and

promotion. However, they also value job security, which has been shown to enhance career-enhancing strategies (Nabi, 2003), values-driven work, and challenging work.

**Self-efficacy: H1 (self-directed) career attitude**

This is an important aspect of contemporary careers with both protean and boundaryless theories having self-efficacy at their root. Proactive individuals approach their job to increase the likelihood of high job performance and engage in career enhancing activities (Nabi, 2003). Seibert *et al.* (1999) showed a modest correlation between proactive personalities and salary, number of promotions and career satisfaction. Eby *et al.* (2003) showed that proactive personality, openness to experience and personal insight were all significantly related to perceived career success and marketability.

The data show that professional staff strongly related to statements concerning self-directed attitudes ( $\mu=4.15$ ), for example:

I expect myself to take responsibility for my career and in identifying skills development (Female, 40-49, UK)

...this [advice from a senior manager] prompted me to take control of my career... (Male 40-49, UK)

My career choices and directions have been mine (Male 50-59, Australia)

**Values-driven career attitude: H2 (values-driven) career attitude**

A career driven by personal values rather than organisational rewards is another key aspect of protean careers (Hall, 2004). The fact that these staff work in universities suggests that they value work that has societal impact consistent with staff working in, for example the public sector (Sargent & Domberger, 2007). Professional staff show values-driven ( $\mu=3.81$ ) career attitudes:

I am not prepared to sacrifice that [loyalty, integrity, making a difference] to be bored or frustrated at work, and I would still seek to leave if my values or my need to be challenged at [sic] not being met (Male 40-49, Australia)

**Mobility: H3 (psychologically mobile) and H4 (geographically mobile) boundaryless career attitudes**

Career development opportunities within organisations can include job placements, secondments or rotations to provide employees with varied work experiences. The argument is that people who spend most of their career in one job, organisation or even sector have

limited knowledge and sets of competencies. Having a variety of experiences is necessary for employees to be able to extract general principles and transfer these to new situations (Dries *et al.*, 2012). Karaevli and Tim (2006) argued that managers' variety of career experience of functional areas plus a breadth of institutional context understanding would be positively associated with promotion, salary and skill acquisition. They also suggested that getting a 'deep' understanding of an area is important so employees internalise the experiences, but that rotation after a few years avoided a person becoming too narrow in scope.

Professional staff related with the psychologically mobile boundaryless mindset ( $\mu=4.24$ ), which points to H3 being supported. However, they showed a less positive attitude towards a geographically mobile attitude, as this factor showed the lowest mean score ( $\mu=3.65$ ) of all factors, and with a higher standard deviation ( $SD=0.74$ ) showing a larger range of opinions. However, Table 2 shows that many of the respondents moved around their own university in order to obtain new learning opportunities and/or promotions:

I am now on secondment in a professional service department which I wanted to undertake to gain new insights, perspectives and see how other departments worked (Male 40-49, UK)

I have worked in the tertiary sector for more than 25 years across 3 different universities. I never stay in one position for more than 3 to 4 years before moving on (White female 50-59, Australia)

I am hoping for a change in role if not promotion to keep me learning and motivated (Female 40-49, UK)

I very much motivated about learning new areas, taking on challenges and responsibilities (Female 30-39, Australia)

...looking for things that interest me and seeking out new challenges when my current role/organisation has ceased to provide them (Male 50-59, Australia)

This may have been due to a lack of clarity between psychologically mobile and geographically mobile attitudes as geographic mobility would include moving from one job to another within the university as well as moving to a new university. This led to H4 being provisionally supported.

**Job security and promotion: H5: Hybrid career attitude**

The traditional career perspective had at its most fundamental a need for job security and career pathways provided by the organisation, to ensure high job

**Table 4: Perceived requirements from the employing university**

Requirements from university	Percentage of staff that 'agree' and 'strongly agree'	
	Australia	UK
Loyalty	58	75
Job security	63	83
A career	74	83
Opportunities for promotion	89	92

productivity and loyalty in its employees. As organisations have changed from a traditional to a contemporary design and the concomitant change to employment contracts and individuals' expectations, one would postulate that employers and employees had embraced this contemporary view of the workplace. However, Dries and Pepermans (2007) showed that both employees and human resource representatives had traditional views of careers i.e. they expected staff to progress hierarchically, and Walton and Mallon (2004) showed that aspects of both traditional (e.g. advancement) and contemporary careers (e.g. enjoyment) were used in individual sense-making of the participants' careers. Career success as viewed as promotions to more senior roles, could be viewed as a journey undertaking demanding transitions and experiences that develop a series of end-state skills. Spreitzer, *et al.* (1997) found that end-state competency plus learning-orientated dimensions predicted executive potential. However, Eichinger and Lombardo (2004) found that learning-agility ratings were unrelated to who received a promotion but that those employees with high learning agility ratings performed better once promoted.

Table 4 shows that professional staff in both countries value job security, an organisational career, and promotion opportunities. However, there is some difference between the respondents from Australia and the UK, with those from Australia generally showing a weaker agreement with the requirements of loyalty, job security, and an organisational career. This difference could be due to the more senior staff that responded. In Australia above Level 10 on the HEW classification (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2010), staff are usually employed on fixed term contracts (FTC) for three or five years (although they may continue to hold permanency at the lower level if promoted within their own institution). This is a key difference compared with senior staff in the UK who would be permanently employed regardless of grade. In Australia an argument for the FTC approach is that staff can have a higher salary than on the HEW agreement, which is negotiated

at institutional level. In the UK staff above salary point 51 (University and College Union (UCU), 2001) have different pay scales than the UCU agreed national salary scales, which are institution specific, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility. Indeed, some senior staff, especially in professional areas such as finance and marketing, where universities often employ from private or public sectors, salary often reflects external salary scales.

The qualitative data support the value that respondents put on the requirements, indicating that, overall, professional staff value aspects of both contemporary and traditional careers and, therefore that H5 is supported:

My stage in life is such that I would very much prefer employment stability as my two children move through secondary education (Male 40-49, Australia)

I expect my university to value my contribution and to provide opportunities for development and promotion (Female 40-49, UK)

Career progression opportunities are similarly limited in this space and I have found that moving institutions is the only effective way to progress (Male 30-39, Australia)

Career progression depends on both the organisational environment in terms of learning opportunities provided as well as an individual's characteristics in terms of their own learning behaviour (Van der Sluis & Poell, 2003). Professional staff showed that they valued learning opportunities and as mentioned above this in part provides higher income and job performance, due to the increase in skills and knowledge of the organisation:

Mutual respect, learning and opportunity to contribute to the big picture motivates me (Female 30-39, Australia)

I am motivated mainly by the opportunity to learn and to make a difference (Male 40-49, UK)

Independent-samples t-tests were run for all hypotheses that showed there was no significant difference between respondents from Australia or the UK.

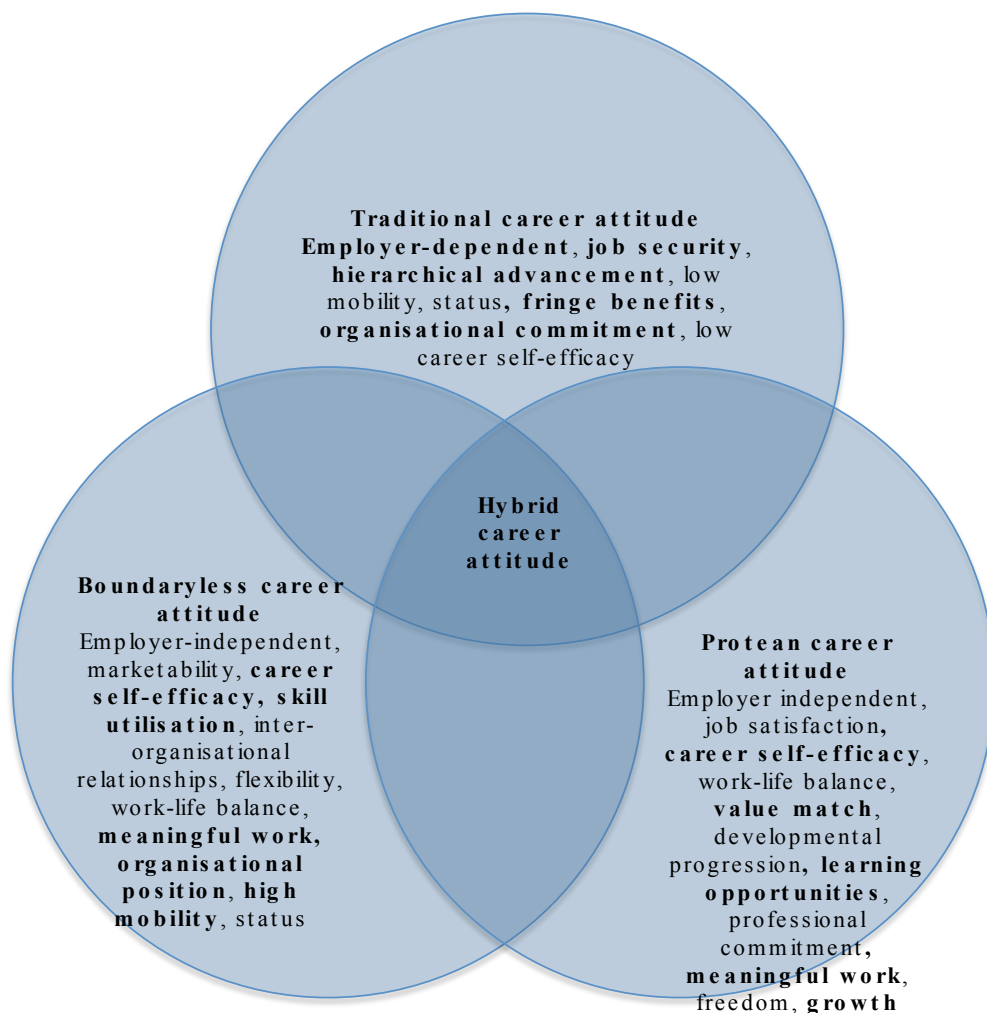
## Discussion

The results of this pilot study into the reliability of the protean and boundaryless questionnaire scales indicate a good level of internal reliability, in line with Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994, p. 252) recommendation that the alpha coefficients are over the 0.70 threshold. Due to the small scale of the study, however, these results should be read with caution as the small number of participants mean that the results can be significantly affected by data transformations

and/or sampling error (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994, p. 133). Integrating the qualitative data from the participants' career stories does go some way further to validating the internal reliability of the questionnaire (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011, p. 62). The data from the pilot survey provide evidence, for the next stage of the research, that the scales are reliable to test the true nature of the protean and boundaryless career attitudes.

This study also advances our understanding of the attitudes of professional staff within universities in Australia and the UK to their careers and their expectations from their employers. This study showed that self-directed and values-driven aspects of the protean career attitudes were significantly correlated ( $r=0.450$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) which agreed with Briscoe *et al.* (2006) results. This is in contrast to Baruch's (2014) study that did not confirm the two-factor model of the protean construct. The psychologically and geographically mobile boundaryless mindsets were not significantly correlated, which also agreed with Briscoe *et al.* (2006) results. This supports a number of previous studies that suggested that employees might be psychologically, but not geographically mobile. Data that highlights labour turnover statistics show that turnover has not increased (Inkson *et al.*, 2012). The self-directed protean career attitude also showed significant correlation to the geographically mobile boundaryless mindset ( $r=0.496$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Professional staff show a strong affiliation for being psychologically mobile but not for geographic mobility. It may be that for these staff they conceptually and physically cross intra-organisational boundaries, which is evidenced by some of the quantitative and qualitative data. That is, in order to both continue feeling fulfilled in their work, and to position themselves better to gain a promotion, they move between roles and/or projects to gain a breadth of experience. This may have also become more important with the opening of the labour market in universities as part of the introduction of new managerialism (Nickson, 2014). There is evidence from these results to suggest that these staff moderate their geographic mobility as the majority have no intention to leave their employer, perhaps due to the need for job security in an increasingly insecure and competitive labour market.

Contemporary career theory argues that employees do not value an organisational type career and, as part of taking responsibility for their own careers, are not bound to one organisation, they are highly mobile and value work-life balance (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Forrier *et al.*, 2005). Conversely, previous research has indicated that organisational careers and aspects of contemporary careers



*Figure 1: The hybrid career attitude of professional staff (bold text shows attitudes shown by professional staff)*

are complementary (Baruch, 2006; Dries & Pepermans, 2007; Walton & Mallon, 2004) or that individuals take hybrid approaches to their careers (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). For example, Walton and Mallon (2004) showed that aspects of both traditional (e.g. advancement) and contemporary careers (e.g. enjoyment) were used in individual sense-making of employees' careers. Research by Çakmak-Otluoğlu (2012) showed that having a boundaryless mindset could co-exist with organisational commitment and did not necessarily equate with mobility and Baruch (2014) noted that protean and traditional career attitudes were not always opposing. These previous studies support a more nuanced approach to career theory and this current research suggests that professional staff value aspects of traditional organisational careers such as loyalty, job security, opportunities for promotion and

an organisational career, but they also show aspects of protean and boundaryless career management attitudes including learning opportunities, skills utilisation, and challenging work - that is they show hybrid career attitudes (Fig. 1).

It could be argued that this hybrid approach to career management has resulted from the rapid change in universities in both countries towards new managerialism (Nickson, 2014) which could result in changes to the careers of those within universities (Clarke, 2012; Inkson *et al.*, 2012). Professional staff may have adopted self-directed approaches to career management to cope with these new realities, organisational restructures, short-term contracts, and external labour market competition for example, but still require a work environment that is intrinsically motivating.



## Implications

The implications of this validated scale applied to professional staff in universities is significant for future research, as contemporary career theories have not been tested on professional staff previously; this scale offers a reliable, concise and practical measure to test employee attitudes. Further research needs to take place to test these early results to fully understand the interplay between protean, boundaryless and traditional career attitudes in this sector and employee cohort.

This research highlights a need for universities' human resource departments to spend further time investigating the attitudes of their professional staff, as there is a clear tension at work in this cohort of staff in terms of their career needs. On the one hand you have professional staff with protean and boundaryless career attitudes: requiring responsibility in the work task, meaningful work, learning opportunities, skills utilisation, and ongoing challenging work assignments. These needs may lead to mobility as employees move around their organisation to continue to feel challenged and motivated. On the other hand, they show the traditional career requirements of loyalty, job security, promotion opportunities and an organisational career. Universities can use this scale to evaluate their employees' career orientations, which have implications for job design, professional development and career planning.

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