

# **PROMOTING PROTEAN CAREER THROUGH JOB-RELATED FACTOR: CAREER STRATEGIES AS MODERATOR**

**Wong Siew Chin & Roziah Mohd Rasdi**  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

## **ABSTRACT**

The study used the partial least squares (PLS) tool to examine job-related factors influencing protean career behaviour among employees. It also measures the impact of career strategies as a moderator in protean career relationships. Quantitative data was collected from 306 full time employees in the Malaysia. Statistical results confirm that job autonomy and job feedback (i.e., job-related factor) have significant impact on protean career. Job-related variables are viewed as potential predictors of protean career. However, there is no significant moderating effect of career strategies on the relationship between job autonomy and job feedback and protean career. Findings are useful for HRD practitioners to develop relevant HRD interventions to assist individuals and organisations towards protean career behaviour development. Limitations and suggestions for future research are also included.

**Keywords :** Protean career, Job autonomy, Job Feedback, Career Strategies

**Corresponding Author's Email Address:** [roziah\\_m@upm.edu.my](mailto:roziah_m@upm.edu.my)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The changing nature of business environments and organizational structures have caused significant impact on employees' career path development. There were great attentions given by researchers and HRD practitioners to re-examine the new career concept and predictors of protean career behaviour (McDonald and Hite, 2013). Due to the challenges of competitive global business environments, massive restructuring and downsizing have been implemented by many organizations in order to enhance organizational efficiency and flexibility (Park and Rothwell, 2009). Inevitably, the changes in work nature have influenced employee's career development in the contemporary work place (Gubler, Arnold, & Coombs 2013). Thus, protean career is increasingly important to employees' career development instead of depending on traditional organization career development programs (Cappellen and Janssens, 2008). Employees embark to develop the career path themselves instead of relying on organizational career development programs. They learned and practice how to navigate their own career based on personal value and self-directness (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Reitman & Schneer, 2008).

Richtel and Wortham (2009) explained that many individuals are now creating work for themselves via internet as an inexpensive tool. Some employees have been laid off or shifted around within their firms in response to changes in organizational strategies. Many individuals are making dramatic career changes in response to individual reflection and re-evaluation (Ibarra, 2003). They have become more self-directed in their careers, or choosing, lateral, or even downward, job moves to fulfil their personal needs (Hall & Las, 2010). Increasingly, individuals are driven more by their own desires than by organizational career management practices. Individuals are adapting to a more transactional employer-employee relationship and taking more responsibility for their own career development and employability (Hall, 2004).

Notably, the previous theoretical and empirical studies have been conducted to explore the potential factors influencing protean career. However, there is still lack of empirically studies to investigate job-related variables in predicting protean career (Hall & Las, 2010; Cullen, 2013). To date, the protean career literatures have not adequately examined the moderating role of career strategies on the relationship between predictor variables and protean career behavior. Hence, this study aims to address the abovementioned research gaps. The objectives of the study is to examine the influence of job-related factors on protean career behaviour, and the moderating role of career strategies on the relationships between the job-related factors and protean career behaviour. The study extends existing knowledge of career management, particularly in the aspect of identifying the potential impact of job-related factors on protean career behaviour.

The paper is organized as follows: We begin by reviewing the definition of protean career, followed by presenting related empirical studies on the association between job-related factors and protean career. The next section describes the methodological aspect of this research, followed by the research findings and discussion. We conclude the paper by outlining the implications of the study for research and management practices as well as the limitations and directions for future studies.

## **DEFINING PROTEIN CAREER**

Protean career is defined as a career where the individual is experiencing greater responsibility for their career choices and career opportunities. The protean individuals value individual freedom and self-growth; and define career success in terms of psychological factors (e.g., job satisfaction, self-actualization, personal accomplishment and sense of self-fulfillment) (Hall and Chandler, 2005). Briscoe and Hall (2006) explained that protean career is emphasizing on value driven and self-directedness dimensions. Value driven attitude refers to “a person’s internal values that provide the guidance and measurement of success for individual career” (Briscoe and Hall, 2006, p.8). Self-directedness is defined as “one who is adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands” (Briscoe and Hall, 2006, p.8). Protean career emphasizes that intrinsic values is the internal motivator for career development (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). In essence, the individual with high protean career is more likely to use their self-defined standards to determine subjective career success instead of following external standard (Briscoe and Hall, 2006).

Subjective success is very unique to individual in term of personal accomplishment, feelings of pride or balance work life (Hall, 2004). Shepard (1984) identified subjective career success application as movement along "path with a heart". By end of 1980s, Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) revealed a new conceptualization of career as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time”. This scope is enhanced with broader definition as compared with the previous definition in 1950s. Arthur et al. (1989) viewed career from the individual’s perspective as a career paid work activities over a lifetime. Hence, career theorists emphasize the attribute of self-directedness as a means of understanding how individual attempts to manage their employability in the workplace (Taber and Briddlick, 2011).

In 2006, Lent and Brown explained the extended SCCT model by including work conditions and outcomes (e.g., job characteristics) elements to the existing model. Noting this revised approach, they clarified that work conditions is more likely to affect individual’s participation in/progress at goal-directed activity (i.e., career goal), and to promote job satisfaction as shown in Figure 1. They highlighted that the extended model served as a foundation for forging closer linkages between vocational and organizational perspectives on job satisfaction. In the article, the terms job and work satisfaction are used interchangeably, that is, the enjoyment of one’s role or experiences while performing a job or work activities.

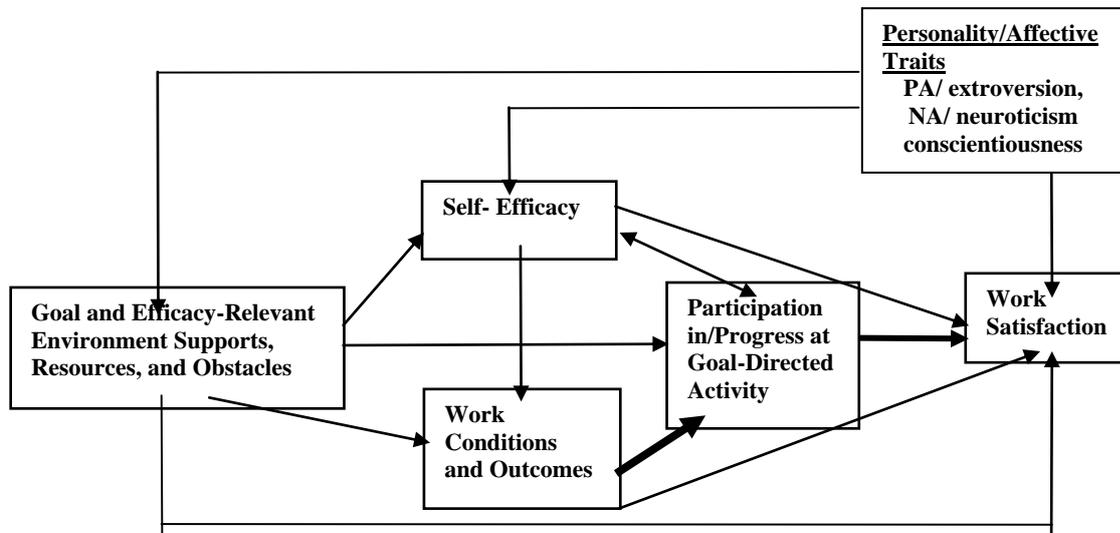
Figure 1 should be here

They further suggested that a career is a sequence of jobs or positions occupied by an individual during a course of time. Career is the specialization in a profession which continues to progress in spite of changes in jobs. Career is determined by job choices that people make over time (Hall & Las, 2010). Therefore, under this conception of career, the discrete jobs condition/characteristics (one at a time) will influence career development decision and choice action. The influence of job-related factors on protean career is discussed in following section.

## **PREDICTORS OR PROTEIN CAREER**

Previous researches finding clearly reported that job-related factors are significant predictors of protean career behavior (Bandura, 1986; Igbaria et al., 2002; Peter, 2005; Berg et al., 2008; Judge et al., 2010; Hall and Las, 2010). Igbaria et al. (2002) indicated that employees who experience a good match between their career orientation and job characteristics reported higher job satisfaction. Subsequently, they are more committed, confident and take charge in career management as compared with employees who experienced a mismatch between job characteristics and career orientation. Peter’s (2005) empirical finding supported the viewpoints that job characteristics are associated with individual career orientation in their career management process. The selected job-related factors in this study are autonomy, task significance and job feedback.

**Figure 1. A PROCESS MODEL OF WORK SATISFACTION THAT HIGHLIGHTS THEORIZED INTERRELATIONS AMONG PERSONALITY, COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES**



Source: Lent and Brown (2006, p.241).

### Job Autonomy

Grant and Ashford (2008) proposed that job characterized by autonomy is more likely to stimulate proactivity among employees. Autonomy not only directly increase employee's controllability of a task, it also facilitate mastery experiences by giving employees the opportunity to acquire new skills and master new responsibility. Parker, Wall, and Jackson (1997) asserted that as organizational structure flatten, employees are given increased job autonomy and latitude to expand their own roles to perform task. They concluded that "job autonomy allows hand-on learning in which people have opportunity to interact with the environment and become more involved in, more knowledge about, the wider production process. This experience might then lead to broader ownership of problems and a more proactive view of performance" (Parker et al., 1997, p.923).

Subsequently, Parker's (1998) findings reported the job autonomy enable employees to develop higher confidence in capabilities to perform a wider range of tasks and responsibility effectively. In turn, due to their greater self-confidence, employees tend to set more proactive, challenging goals and strive to achieve them in a proactive manner (Parker, 2000). Grant and Parker's (2009) study found that autonomy to proactive behaviors can increase the likelihood of employees to experience personal responsibility for their work (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Related field studies have shown that autonomy predicts higher level of proactive behavior in protean career behavior (Fay & Frese, 2001; Morgeson & Campion, 2003; McAllister, Kamdar, Morrison & Turban, 2007; Grant & Parker, 2009).

One of most impressive empirical evidence of autonomy in stimulating proactive behavior was conducted by Frese, Garst and Fay (2007). They were engaged in a two-year, four-wave and multi-method longitudinal study on a representative sample of employees in East Germany city. They revealed that autonomy is correlated to personal initiatives affecting proactive career development. These findings were in line with the research conducted by Williamson et al. (2005) on 1,352 librarians and informational science professionals. They found that autonomy will assert oneself taking charge of situations and perform self-directed manner without reliance on others in career development. The autonomy variable explained 19 percent ( $R^2=0.189$ ) of variance in career development. Individual with more autonomy at work, experience a greater level of job satisfaction, which is associated with career satisfaction in a broader context (Judge et al., 1995).

Another study replicated by Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger and Hemingway (2005) revealed that autonomy is important to improve employees' capability of handling larger responsibility. They are more likely to be motivated and able to take advantage of job autonomy to cope with and learn from their job demands, eventually

to take initiative for own career development. Based on the empirical outcomes of previous studies, present study determines that autonomy is one of the prominent predicting variables in explaining employees' protean career behavior.

Based on these empirical evidences, we propose that:

H<sub>1</sub>: job autonomy has significant and positive relationships with employees' protean career.

### **Job Feedback**

Based on Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (1976), job feedback examines the extent of work activities which provide the job incumbent direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance. As such, employees would be able to improve their performance based on the feedback or inputs gather from job performed. Employee would find their job interesting if they receive sufficient feedback for continuous improvement (Johanim, Khulida, Daratul & Abdullah, 2011).

The researchers found that by obtaining adequate information and feedback on the performance (i.e. job done), employees have the opportunity to improve their quality or work periodically. Their understanding towards the employer' expectation will help them to develop positive attitude and ultimately produce favorable behavior outcomes which reflected through high level of job performance and satisfaction. In addition, job feedback is highly correlated with all psychological and behavior outcomes (e.g. proactive career behavior) (Fried & Ferris, 1987; O' Reilly, Anderson, Ven den Berg & Feij, 2003). To sum up, job feedback dimensions has been considered an important influence on individuals' intrinsic motivation and confidence, which lead to higher level of job satisfaction and pro-activeness of career development (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; George & Zhau, 2001; Demerouti, 2006).

Black and Ashford (1995) studied how new employees change their own roles to "make jobs fit" after receiving job-related feedback from others in order to improve their job satisfaction and manage own career appropriately. In a similar vein, a meta-analysis study conducted by Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson (2007) found that job feedback is job-related social characteristics associated with job satisfaction among employee. Job feedback dimension explained an incremental variance of 40 percent of desired working behavior (i.e. proactive action).

A study conducted on 212 care-givers for Alzheimer patients by Coogle, Pargam and Young (2007) found that there was significant relationship between job feedback and protean career behavior ( $F [1, 210]=4.74, p<.05$ ). De Vos and Dewettinck's (2007) study on 1,036 engineers working in different departments and business units in different countries of a large international company. The findings showed that employees' protean career behavior is related to job enrichment preferences ( $\beta=0.23, p<.01$ ) via job feedback process. When employees received feedback from their manager about their job performance and competencies, this will provide them the confidences and courages to develop protean career .

Similarly, Azash, Safari, Thirupalu and Subhan (2012) revealed that job feedback is significantly associated with intrinsic motivation (e.g., similar to value driven dimension of protean career behavior) at  $r =.138 (p<.05)$ . They stressed that the job feedback dimension is statistically significant to predict the level of intrinsic motivation, enabling employees to demonstrate self-directed behavior in career management. Hence, this study proposed:

H<sub>2</sub>: Job feedback has significant and positive relationships with employees' protean career.

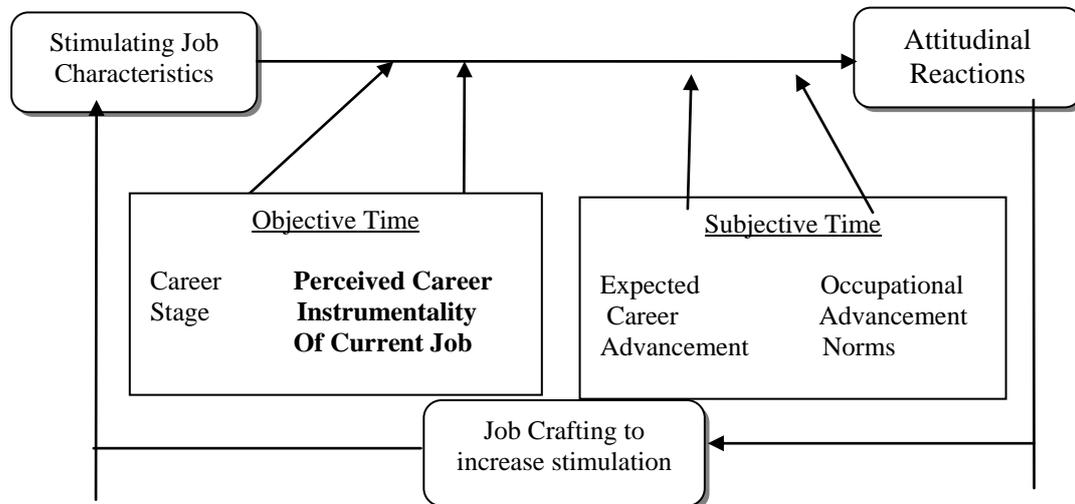
### **CAREER STRATEGIES AS MODERATOR VARIABLE**

In the present study, career strategies are identified as contextual factor proximally to moderate the relationship between the job-related variables and protean career behaviour. Individuals used career strategies to facilitate career development and career goals progression under a specific job design in the workplace (Grant, Fried and Juillerat, 2010).

Indeed, several studies have suggested to incorporate proximal and distal contextual factors into job characteristics theory and to examine the relationship between job characteristics and attitudinal outcomes (Parker, Wall & Cordery, 2001; Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Torraco, 2005). The attitudinal outcomes including employee's proactive reactions to craft more stimulating jobs (Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani & Slowik, 2007). In 2007, Fried et al. depicted that perceived career instrumentality of current job (i.e., performing current job is

viewed as strategies/instruments to provide opportunities for future career development) moderates the relationship between job characteristics and attitudinal reactions (Refer Figure 2).

**Figure 2. A CAREER DYNAMIC MODEL OF REACTIONS AND MODERATING EFFECTS IN JOB DESIGN**



Source: Fried et al., (2007, p. 915).

The diagram highlights the reciprocal, dynamic relationships between job characteristics, attitudinal reactions and job crafting. The model examines the context of perceived career instrumentality of current job which is synonymously with career strategy influencing the relationship between job characteristics and employees' attitudinal reactions in a proactive manner. For instance, they might seize the opportunity to convince managers that they are capable of succeeding in more challenging jobs. They seek to demonstrate that they can handle increased responsibilities and complexity (Hui, Lam & Law, 2000). In this context, career strategies including the acquisition or enhancement of work abilities that either improve performance in the present job or take practical initiatives to manage one's career (Greenhaus et al., 2010).

Generally, individual pursues a particular career strategy based on the expectation that it provides them with the greatest opportunity of attaining personal and professional success (Greenhaus et al., 2010), such as attaining competence in current job, putting in extended working hours, developing new skills, developing new opportunities at current work, attaining a mentor, building one's image and reputation, and engaging in organizational politics. Substantial studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between career strategies and career development over the last few decades (Gould and Penley, 1984; King, 2004; Greenhaus et al., 2010). However, relevant empirical research in examining career strategies as a moderator variable influencing protean career is still lacking, especially to identify moderating effect of career strategies on the relationship between job-related variables and protean career behaviour.

In this study, career strategies is identified as a moderator that affects the relationship between job-related variables and protean career among professional employees. It is predicted that job-related variables such as autonomy and job feedback will have a stronger relationship to protean career when high level usage of career strategies than when usage level of career strategies is low.

For instance, a high level of usage of career strategies, particularly in developing new knowledge, skills and ability is associated with job autonomy over time. Employees with new knowledge and skills are more likely to have higher autonomy in job crafting and achieve higher job satisfaction and work motivation. Employees who experience such internal motivation and satisfaction due to high stimulating job characteristics (e.g., autonomy) may actually increase their growth need strength (GNS) (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). When the individuals find growth enjoyable, they value it as a result. Consequently, this may influence individuals' initiative and responsibility in career development. Those with high GNS responded more favourably to proactive career behaviour (Crant & Parker, 2009). They also reported that over the long run, internal motivation leads to an increase in the preference for self-directed career activities as the core of protean career behaviour. In contrast, when the level of usage of strategies is low especially in developing new skills and knowledge, employee may

have limited task skill variety to enable them to take charge of situation and exercise initiatives at work. Consequently this might lead to incompetent management of individual career development and low in proactive career behaviour.

In a similar vein, Yamamoto (2006) supported that there is interaction effect among job involvement with specific job characteristics, career strategies and inter-organizational career orientation (IOCO). To develop an IOCO requires self-directed and value driven on the part of employees (Hall, 1974). In other words, protean career dimensions (i.e., self-directedness and value driven) are adopted to support employees' IOCO (Yamamoto, 2006). The group of employees with high level usage of career strategies (e.g., self-nomination and career insight) in job involvement with specific job characteristics reported high level of IOCO. This is consistent with Feij et al.'s (1995) study that employees who use career strategies frequently, their job involvement was high and thus, contributed to the adoption of proactive career behaviour. On the other hand, employees with low level of usage of career strategies may resulting low in IOCO. They might have limited recognition to the possibility of protean career development due to lacking of appropriate action plan in managing career choice (Yamamoto, 2006).

Based on the above discussion, this study hypothesized that:

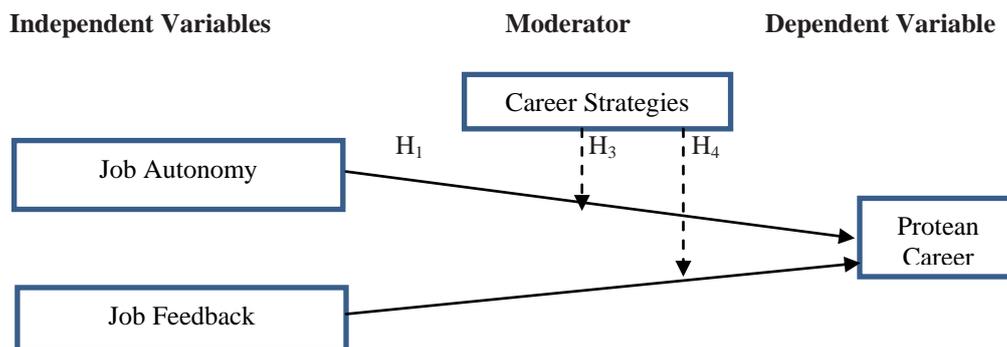
H<sub>3</sub>: Career strategies moderates the relationship between autonomy and protean career. Specifically, this positive relationship will be stronger when level of usage of career strategies is high than when level of usage of career strategies is low.

H<sub>4</sub>: Career strategies moderates the relationship between job feedback and protean career. Specifically, this positive relationship will be stronger when level of usage of career strategies is high than when level of usage of career strategies is low.

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Based on reviews of related literature, we proposed a research framework of employees' protean career. Figure 3 depicts the research framework and the hypothesized relationships in the study.

Figure 3. A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR PREDICTING PROTEAN CAREER



## METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sample

The sampling frame comprised multinational corporations (MNCs) in the E&E industry. The sampling units were employees from different departments. In this study, cluster random sampling method was employed to determine the MNCs in the selected states in Malaysia, and random selection was utilized to select the samples from each selected state. A total of 306 questionnaires were received and used for analysis which represents about 87% of response rate. This study involved 46.7% male and 53.3% female professional employees. The majority of the respondents' age ranged from 31- 40 years old. A total number of 52.3% of the respondents have work tenure of less than seven years, followed by 25.5% having work tenure of more than 15 years, 22.2% having work tenure between seven to 15 years. Overall, 42.8% of the respondents have organizational tenure of

more than 15 years and 56.2% for ten years or less. The next section presents the assessment of the goodness of measure of the constructs in terms of their validity and reliability.

### **Instrumentation**

All instruments were adopted from previous studies and were modified to measure the study's variables. The questionnaire using five-point Likert scale was applied to all constructs.

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

The eight items scale was adapted based on the work of Briscoe and Hall (2006). All items were measured using a 5 point Likert-like scale with values 1="to little or no extent" to 5="to a great extent". Sample item was "I am responsible for my success or failure in my career". The composite reliability in this study was .89.

#### ***Job Autonomy***

There are nine items which were adopted and adapted from Morgeson and Humphrey (2005) with internal reliability of .86. Each item was rated on five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree". Sample items are "The job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work" and "The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own. In this study, the composite reliability for job autonomy was 0.947.

#### ***Job Feedback***

This unidimensional construct scale was adopted and adapted from Morgeson and Humphrey (2005) with internal reliability,  $\alpha = .86$ . The scale consists of five items which were responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1="strongly disagree" to 5="Strongly agree". Sample items are "I receive a great deal of information from my manager and coworkers about my job performance" and "The job itself provides feedback on my performance". In this study, the composite reliability was 0.880.

#### ***Career strategies***

Career strategies are measured using a six-item scale adapted from Gould and Penley's (1984) career strategies inventory. The items were measured on a five-point scale with 1="to little or no extent" to 5="to a great extent". Sample item was "Developing skills which may be needed in future career position." The composite reliability found in this study was 0.88.

### **Convergent Validity**

We tested the convergent validity which is the degree to which a set of indicators (items) that presume to measure a construct fit the theories (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2010). It represents the strength of the relationships between items that are predicted to represent a single latent construct. Based on Hair et al. (2010), factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) (i.e., the sum of the squared loadings divided by the number of indicators) were used to examine convergent validity.

As showed in Table 1, the loadings for all items were greater than the recommended value of .5 (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability indicated the latent constructs ranged from .88 to .95 which exceeded the recommended value of .7 (Hair et al., 2010). Subsequently, the AVE (to measure the variance captured by the indicators relative to measurement error) for respective constructs were above the recommended value of .5 (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, convergent validity requirement was fulfilled in this study.

### **Discriminant Validity**

Discriminant validity explains the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs. As shown in Table 2, the correlations for each construct were less than the square root of AVE for the indicators measuring that particular construct, which indicating adequate discriminant validity. In total, the measurement model demonstrates adequate convergent and discriminant validity in this study.

**TABLE 1: RESULT OF MEASUREMENT MODEL**

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	CR
Protean Career	PC10	0.648	0.516	0.893
	PC14	0.653		
	PC2	0.737		
	PC3	0.778		
	PC4	0.805		
	PC5	0.806		
	PC6	0.707		
	PC9	0.576		
Job Autonomy	AUTO1	0.782	0.665	0.947
	AUTO2	0.836		
	AUTO3	0.813		
	AUTO4	0.831		
	AUTO5	0.808		
	AUTO6	0.768		
	AUTO7	0.816		
	AUTO8	0.849		
	AUTO9	0.834		
Job Feedback	FB1	0.749	0.597	0.881
	FB2	0.860		
	FB3	0.833		
	FB4	0.735		
	FB5	0.672		
Career Strategies	SN1	0.681	0.591	0.878
	SN2	0.768		
	SN3	0.828		
	SN4	0.792		
	SN5	0.767		

**Table 2: DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY**

	Job Autonomy	Job Feedback
Job Autonomy	<b>0.812</b>	
Job Feedback	0.477	<b>0.772</b>

Note: Diagonals (bold text) represent the square root of the AVE while the off-diagonals represent the correlations

### Hypothesis Testing

In this section, we discuss the path analysis to test the four postulated hypotheses. Table 3 and Figure 4 present the results from PLS output. The  $R^2$  value indicated that 28% of the variance in the protean career behavior is explained by job autonomy and job feedback (e.g., job-related factors). Further analysis shows that job autonomy ( $\beta = .293, p < .01$ ), and job feedback ( $\beta = .272, p < .05$ ) were positively related to protean career. Thus, H1, and H2 were supported. A close examination explained that job autonomy was more important as compared with job feedback.

**Table 3. SUMMARY OF THE STRUCTURAL MODEL AND INTERACTION EFFECT ON PROTEAN CAREER**

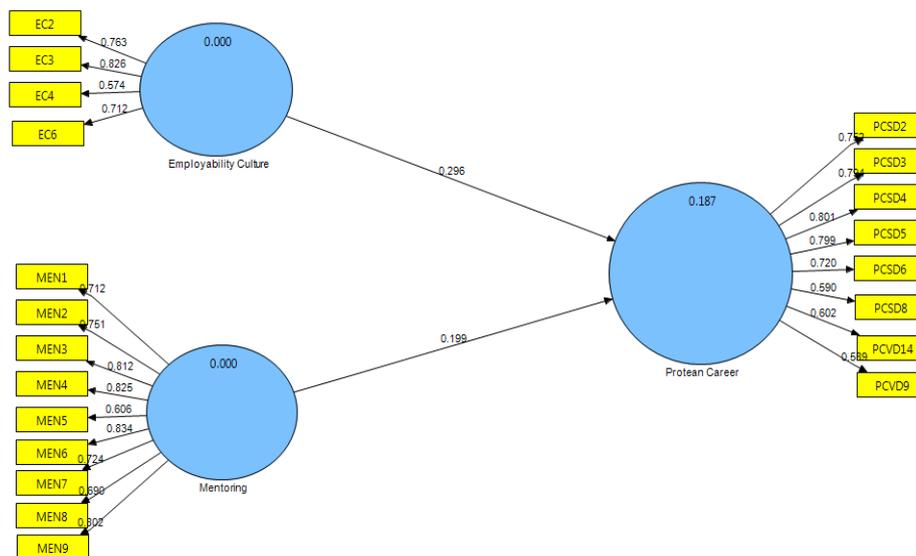
Relationship	Path Coefficient	SE	t-value	Decision
Job Autonomy → Protean Career (H <sub>1</sub> )	0.293	0.06	4.577*	<b>Supported</b>
Job Feedback → Protean Career (H <sub>2</sub> )	0.272	0.06	4.427*	<b>Supported</b>
Job Autonomy* Career Strategies --> Protean Career (H <sub>3</sub> )	0.012	0.055	0.415	Not Supported
Job Feedback * Career Strategies -->Protean Career (H <sub>4</sub> )	0.009	0.050	0.425	Not Supported

\* $p < 0.01$

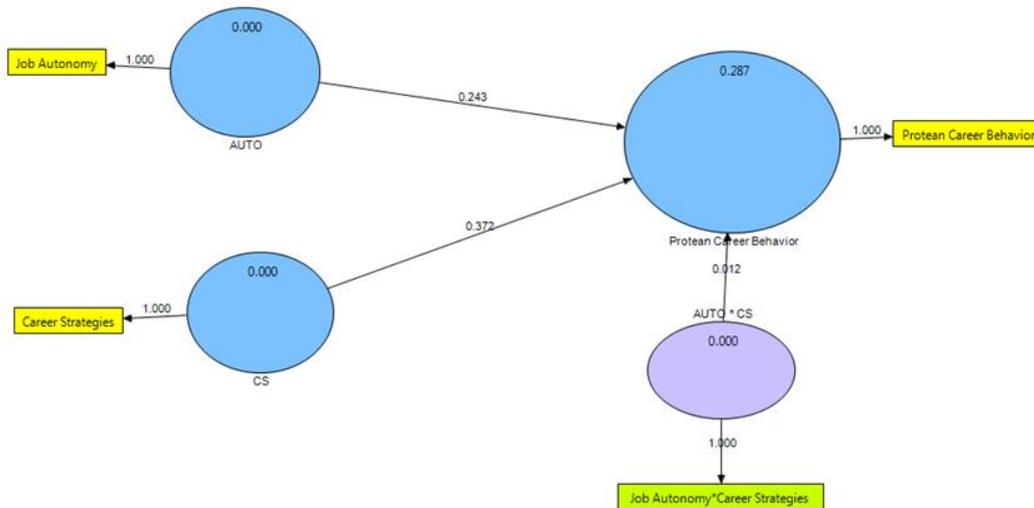
**Moderation effect**

To test the moderation effect of career strategies, two-stage Partial Least Square (PLS) (Henseler and Chin, 2010) was employed to investigate the moderation effect of career strategies on the relationship between organizational-related variables and protean career behavior (all constructs were measured by reflective indicators). Latent variable scores (LVS) of job autonomy, job feedback and career strategies (i.e., moderating variable) were used as independent variables. LVS of protean career was treated as the dependent variable within PLS path modeling. The path model is modified to become a single indicator measurement model (Henseler and Chin, 2010) (Refer Figure 5 and Figure 6). However, the results shown in Table 3 indicated that all the path coefficients of the hypothesized interaction relationship were not significant. Thus, hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub> were not supported.

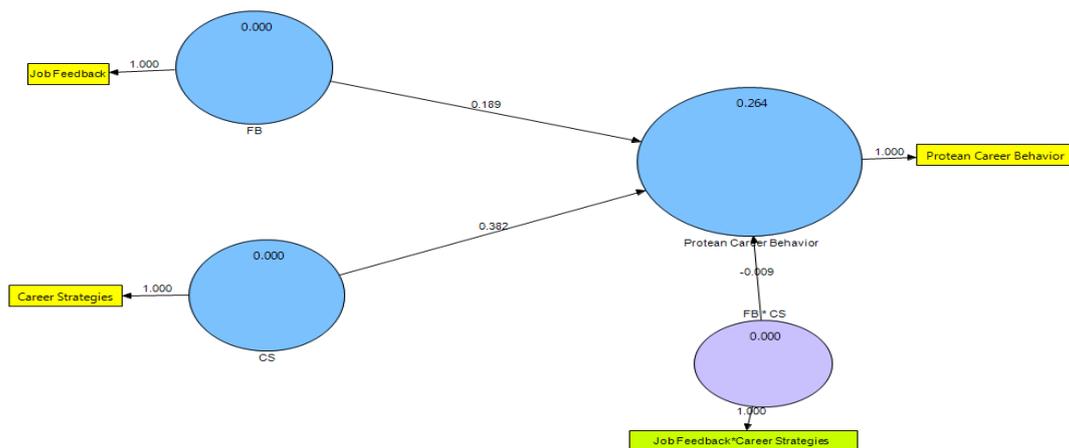
**Figure 4: RESULT OF PATH ANALYSIS (STRUCTURAL MODEL)**



**Figure 5: Moderation Path Model of Job Autonomy and Career Strategies on Protean Career**



**Figure 6: Moderation Path Model of Job Feedback and Career Strategies on Protean Career**



## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study showed that job-autonomy predicted protean career ( $H_1$ ). The result was consistent with Fay and Frese's (2001) and McAllister et al.'s (2007) studies who investigated that job autonomy influenced protean career. The participation of professional employees in decision making, resources allocation, strategies formulation and implementation have improved their job performance as well as capability of handling larger responsibilities. They are more likely to be motivated and able to take advantage of job autonomy to cope with and learn from their job demands, eventually taking initiative and confidence for individual career development.

Moreover, many MNCs complement existing organizational structure with project-based team design in order to enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Particularly to implement relevant supply chain projects in order to increase organizational agility and competitive edges. In supply chain operational context, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems and supply chain management (SCM) systems are widely used to support the coordination of activities across major organizational components and time based competition (TBC) in customer relationship management (Bateman & Snell, 2013). TBC aims to reduce total time needed to deliver good and services to the customers (Bateman & Snell, 2013). The supply chain project-based team design contributes to a high level of job autonomy and empowerment among professional employees (Robbins & Judge, 2013). The empowerment and delegation of task from managers to relevant project members has increased the flexibility and responses to the changes in market demand. Williamson et al. (2005) concluded that job autonomy will assert oneself taking charge of situations and perform self-directed behavior without reliance on others in career development.

Similar to the job autonomy variable, job-feedback variable (H<sub>2</sub>) also significantly predicted protean career among professional employees in the E&E industry. The result of this study was consistent with Humphrey et al.'s (2007) and Coogle et al.'s (2007) findings which concluded job feedback has significant effect on protean career. The context of this current study had possibly led to this consistent outcome. It should be noted that most of the respondents of this study are first line managers and non-managerial employees. They were exposed to job feedback and information about performance of different intensity from their immediate superiors and co-workers. In certain circumstances, the timely and periodically feedback from managers is provided to ensure job effectiveness and efficiency (Robbins & Judge, 2013). As such, employees are trained to master necessary job skills in performing their routine tasks effectively by obtaining appropriate amount of job feedback from managers and co-workers.

Our findings revealed that there is no significant moderation effect of career strategies on the relationship between job autonomy and job feedback and protean career. To date, the review of previous researches indicated that there is no empirical evidence to support the moderating effect of career strategies on the relationship between job-related variables and protean career. Similarly, the findings of the study did not support the interaction effect between job-related factors and career strategies on protean career behaviour among professional employees in the E&E industry.

The result perhaps may be due to the context of the study i.e., the E&E industry. The large bureaucratic organizations (MNCs) in which the current research was conducted had a standard operational system to determine specific job descriptions for non-managerial levels. It should be noted that 63.1% of the respondents of this study were in non-managerial levels (e.g., assistant executives/ engineers/ executives/ superintendents/ senior executives/ engineers/ superintendents, senior executives/ engineers) in the hierarchical bureaucracy structure.

Most of their job descriptions and job designs are well structured and defined according to the daily operations. The professional employees perform the standard activities in highly routine manner in order to meet the performance expectations.

Rules and regulations substitute for job discretion (e.g., job autonomy). Standard operations procedures and high formalization system restrict the practises of specific strategies in performing routine jobs. Employees follow the established job designs (e.g., job autonomy and job feedback) and guidelines strictly to accomplish the job requirement (Robbins & Judge, 2013). In relations to such highly standardized and routinized operation in workplace, specific strategies (e.g., developing new skills and opportunities at work, self-nomination and job content innovation) are not required to be instrumental to achieve targeted job performance. Employees perceived that by following well defined and systematic procedures, which lead them to achieve the desired job performance and career development without influence of any career enhancing strategies.

In addition, due the high specialization and departmentalization of organizational structure in MNCs, this reduces the interaction opportunities among professional employees from different backgrounds and department. In this context, there are limited use of networking strategies which involves building networks inside the organization and obtaining useful information and support.

#### **STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study has some limitations and suggestions for future research. First, the sample of this study is employees from the MNCs in Malaysia E&E industry. The generalization of the study findings may be limited. Further studies can be done by including different industries (e.g., tourism, education and public sector) for the purpose

of improving generalizability. Second, it is recommended to consider career strategies as a mediator in order to obtain more comprehensive results on the predictors of the protean career.

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