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# Can organizational commitment be experienced by individuals pursuing contemporary career paths?

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## Abstract

*In a context in which organizations can no longer promise life-time employment and individuals increasingly experience inter-organizational mobility, this study tackles the question of whether organizational commitment is no longer related to new career orientations. To this end, it analyzes the relation between the underlying dimensions of protean (self direction and values driven) and boundaryless (boundaryless mindset and organizational mobility preference) career attitudes (Briscoe et al., 2006) and organizational commitment, within today's unstable and uncertain business scenario. Research results suggest that protean career attitudes contribute significantly to individuals' emotional attachment to their employing organization. Furthermore, organizational mobility preference was found to be significant in predicting both affective and continuance commitment. Finally, future research suggestions and practical implications associated with the current study are provided.*

Keywords: organizational commitment; boundaryless career; protean career

## Introduction

Nowadays, a growing consensus recognizes that traditional orderly and hierarchical careers are increasingly losing ground to new career conceptualizations, such as boundaryless and protean perspectives, which better capture the realities of a changing scenario (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Bridges, 1995; Golzen & Garner, 1990; Handy, 1994; Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994). These two perspectives suggest that the individuals become the sculptors of their own careers (Bell & Staw, 1989), which are less bounded to a single employment setting (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). In spite of some constructive critiques (e.g. Zeitz, Blau & Fertig, 2009), the idea of "boundaryless careers" has garnered increasing interest in United States, as well as in the European countries (Dany, 2003; Pang 2003; Ackah and Heaton, 2004; Guest 2004). However, there are very few studies in the Spanish context centred on the aspects of the new careers.

Researchers have argued that new realities of the current economy, among which changes in psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995) and a diminished sense of job security (Cappelli, 1999), require a further re-examination of the organizational commitment concept (Baruch, 1998), as commitment cannot be viewed in the same way as it was when employees could expect to spend their entire career with a single company (Meyer, Allen, & Topolnytsky, 1998). While under the transactional contract, workers exchanged loyalty and commitment for job security, under the relational contract, workers exchange performance for continuous learning, marketability and future employability (Mirvis & Hall, 1996; Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995). It has been noted that organiza-

tional commitment is losing relevance, in the favour of career commitment and job satisfaction, as individuals pursue more emotionally satisfying lives through the discover of their vocatus (Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003). As organizations can no longer promise life-time employment and individuals increasingly experience inter-organizational mobility, is organizational commitment no longer related to new career orientations?

This study attempts to examine the extent to which protean and boundaryless career attitudes, encompassing self-direction, predisposition to make choices based on personal values, openness to the exterior and individual inclination to organizational mobility (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006) affect organizational commitment mindsets reflecting desire (affective commitment) and perceived cost of leaving (continuance commitment), drawing on a sample of 167 Spanish professionals.

### Boundaryless and protean careers and their corresponding attitudes

Until recently the majority of the empirical research on careers presumed environmental stability and emphasized the objective perspective on careers that prevailed over the subjective one (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). In this context, traditional career models were conceived as linear progression in one or two companies and evolving through a series of interconnected stages for climbing the organizational ladder (Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957). However, during the last decades, researchers (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002; Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) have argued that in response to substantial changes induced by today's unstable and hypercompetitive knowledge driven context, careers increasingly become more boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and individuals develop protean mindsets (Hall, 1976, 2002) for successfully navigating the current business scenario. As opposed to the paternalistic perspective that characterized traditional careers, boundaryless and protean orientations emphasize the active role of the individuals in managing their own careers and professional development, for enhancing opportunities for continuous learning, future marketability and psychologically meaningful work.

A boundaryless career is viewed as "independent from, rather than dependent on, traditional career arrangements" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996:6), as it transcends the boundaries of a single employment setting. In spite of the fact that some authors have approached boundaryless careers uniquely considering physical changes in work arrangements (Jones, 1996; Saxenian, 1996), Sullivan and Arthur (2006) emphasize the complexity of the boundaryless career concept and, thus, the need of viewing mobility as measured along two continua (physical and psychological), in order to fully capture the meaning of career boundarylessness. In an extensive review of the empirical research conducted on the changing nature of careers, Sullivan (1999) asserted that the majority of studies examined mobility across physical boundaries, while neglecting psychological mobility and its relationship with physical mobility. In that sense, the

physical mobility prevailed over the psychological one mainly due to the difficulty arisen when measuring individuals' perceptions of their capacity to make transitions (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

Recognizing that a boundaryless career attitude is primarily psychological, Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth (2006) provided empirical evidence, supporting for the existence of two boundaryless career attitudes: boundaryless mindset (BM) and organizational mobility preference (OMP). Briscoe et al. (2006) defined a boundaryless mindset as a general attitude of transcending organizational boundaries, by feeling comfortable in interacting with people from different organizations and seeking out opportunities for experiencing new situations that result beneficial for the individual (e.g. providing the opportunity to enhance knowledge and skills). Organizational mobility preference, on the other hand, refers to the strength of interest in remaining with a single or multiple employer(s) (Briscoe et al., 2006). Thus, it is concerned with one's preference for job security, predictability and long-term employment arrangements.

Researchers and practitioners have argued that successful navigation of the current scenario requires the development of a distinct mindset, called protean orientation (Hall, 1976, 2002; Hall, 2004). Within the context of a protean career, individuals, rather than their employing organizations, become the architects of their own careers, development and vocational destiny. This orientation represents an internally driven and self-directed perspective in managing one's career that reflects values such as freedom and adaptability (Hall, 1976, 2002). Similarly, a protean career was described as a contract with oneself, rather than with the organization, as individuals take active responsibility in managing their careers and transforming their career path (Baruch, 2004). Thus, the hallmarks of a protean orientation are: freedom and growth, professional commitment, the attainment of psychological success, through the pursuit of meaningful work and the discovery of a "calling" (Hall, 2004; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Moreover, it has been argued that taking responsibility for managing one's career development can deliver positive psychological outcomes, including career and life satisfaction, enhanced self-efficacy and well-being, as well as extrinsic career progression if desired career outcomes are achieved (Crant, 2000; King, 2004; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001).

Briscoe et al. (2006) identified two protean-career relevant attitudes: self-directed career attitudes (SD) and values-driven predispositions (VD), and developed scales for measuring them. As they remarked, a self-directed person takes an independent and proactive role in managing his or her vocational behaviour, while individuals who hold values-driven attitudes rely on their own values, instead of borrowing external standards, when making career choices.

The main focus of this study is to explore the relationship between boundaryless and protean career attitudes and individuals' affective and continuance commitment to their employing organizations. Establishing a relationship between protean

and boundaryless career attitudes and organizational commitment would enable determining behavioural consequences of the different career attitudes, as commitment has been identified as one of the most salient predictors of turnover, organizational citizenship behaviour, performance and attendance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982a; Shore & Wayne, 1993). Moreover, in a context in which organizations are striving for winning the war for talent, fostering organizational commitment of key employees is essential for gaining and sustaining competitive advantages.

### Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment has been defined as “a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to one or more targets” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001:301). It has been argued that this force is experienced as a mindset that can take different forms, thus reflecting distinguishable components of the underlying commitment construct. Meyer and Allen (1991) developed a multidimensional model of organizational commitment, including three different mindsets: desire to remain in the organization (affective commitment), obligation to remain (normative commitment) and perceived cost of leaving (continuance commitment). This model has been subjected to the greatest empirical scrutiny and has arguably received greatest support (see Meyer et al. (1997) and Meyer et al. (2002) for reviews). From among these components, affective commitment (AC) and continuance commitment (CC) were chosen as the focus of this study because they are most distinguishable from each other (Meyer et al., 2002). Normative commitment (NC) has been left aside because affective and normative commitments have not been as empirically differentiated as theoretically expected (Bergman, 2006). Meyer et al.’s (2002) meta-analysis found that affective and normative commitment are so highly correlated that their distinguishability is in question. These two components were found to be correlated at 0.63, which means that a substantial value of the variance (nearly 40%) in one is explained by the other. Therefore, further normative commitment conceptualization and scale development and validation are needed (Bergman, 2006).

As reflected in the organizational commitment definition, this concept makes reference to a binding force that induces behaviour. Both Mathieu and Zajac (1990)’s meta-analysis and Meyer et al. (2002)’s subsequent research examined the most significant extant empirical research that explored and tested the consequences of organizational commitment. Among these consequences, it is important to highlight the extant literature related to employees’ turnover (Gellatly, Meyer, & Luchak, 2006; Luchak & Gellatly, 2007; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982b) and/or turnover cognitions/intention to leave, which has been analyzed as a proxy. Moreover, absenteeism (Mowday et al., 1982b), job performance (Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Gilbert, 1996; Meyer et al., 1989; Somers & Birnbaum, 1998), organizational citizenship behavior (Gellatly et al., 2006; Shore & Wayne, 1993), employee’s health and well-being (Be-

gley & Czajka, 1993; Reilly, 1994; Siu, 2003), or employee lateness (Koslowsky, Sagie, Krausz, & Singer, 1997) have also been identified as salient consequences of employees' organizational commitment.

Meyer et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis reveals that organizational commitment is related to three antecedent categories: personal variables (e.g., age, gender, education, organizational tenure), job and role characteristics (role conflict, role ambiguity, level of autonomy, job level, career mobility) and structural factors (social involvement, personal importance and formalization). Various authors have examined the effects of these antecedent categories upon affective, continuance and normative commitment, revealing valuable implications for human resource practices (Smeenk et al., 2006). Nevertheless, little research has examined the influence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes upon organizational commitment.

Protean and boundaryless career attitudes and organizational commitment: Where is the link?

Drawing on the regulatory focus theory, this section attempts to tackle the existence of a potential relationship between boundaryless and protean career attitudes and organizational commitment. Regulatory focus theory proposes that self-regulation in relation with strong ideals (i.e. what one wants to be) versus strong oughts (i.e. what other think one should be) differs in regulatory focus. Ideal self-regulation involves a promotion focus, concerned with advancement, growth and accomplishments, whereas ought self-regulation involves a prevention focus, concerned with security and safety (Higgins, 1998).

Moreover, regulatory focus influences individuals' perceptions about their goals and the implications this has for goal-oriented behaviour (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). Individuals with a promotion focus see themselves as working towards the attainment of their ideals, thus experiencing eagerness to attain advances and gains. On the contrary, individuals with a prevention focus are attempting to fulfil their obligations, and consequently they experience a state of vigilance to assure safety and non-losses. Therefore, Higgins (1998) argued that individuals with a strong prevention focus seek to satisfy minimum requirements for fulfilment, whereas those with a promotion focus seek to achieve the maximum level of accomplishment. In addition, building on the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), Meyer et al. (2004) proposed that on the one hand, employees with a promotion focus view their behaviour as more internally driven, experiencing intrinsic, identified and integrated regulation. On the other hand, those experiencing a prevention focus perceive their behaviour as more externally driven (external or introjected regulation).

Building on the concept of self-regulation and regulatory focus theory, Meyer et al. (2004) suggested that commitment should exert a direct effect on goal regulation, and the different forms of commitment should have a significant impact on the corresponding forms of regulation. Subsequently, they argued that employees with a



stronger affective commitment (AC) experience greater intrinsic motivation, more autonomous forms of external regulation and a stronger promotion focus.

Individuals who are self-directed in adapting to the performance and learning demands of their careers perceive their behaviour as internally driven, reflecting “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise their capacities, to explore and to learn” (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 70). Moreover, they are expected to exhibit a promotion focus, as they proactively manage their career development and thus see themselves as working toward the attainment of their ideals. Therefore, a self-directed attitude in career management is expected to be positively related with affective commitment.

The mindset associated with continuance commitment (CC) is very different from the psychological state associated with AC. CC was described as a cost-based form of commitment that is based on one’s belief that leaving the relationship would incur high personal sacrifices and / or available alternatives are limited or inexistent (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Instead of being motivated by a desire to remain, employees with higher levels of CC stay in order to minimize losses; in effect they stay because they believe they have little choice. Meyer et al. (2004) proposed that individuals with stronger continuance commitment experience greater external regulation (feel that their choices are controlled) and a stronger prevention focus. In the light of these considerations, we expect that:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between self-direction in career management and affective commitment.*

*H2: There is a negative relationship between self-direction in career management and continuance commitment.*

With regard to values-driven predispositions, we expect that a person who is not very clear on his or her values is more inclined to accept and adopt organizational values and for this reason he or she might be likely to develop affective bonds with the employing organization or in other words, he or she is expected to experience moderated to high levels of affective commitment. In addition, based on the regulatory focus theory, it can be asserted that high values-driven individuals experience greater external regulation and a stronger promotion focus, as they perceive themselves as working towards the attainment of their ideals. Therefore, we expect that:

*H3: There is a positive relationship between values-driven predispositions and affective commitment.*

*H4: There is a negative relationship between values-driven predispositions and continuance commitment.*

A boundaryless mindset is described as an opening attitude to the exterior, involving comfortableness and enthusiasm about creating and sustaining active relationships across organizational boundaries. It refers to enjoying job assignments that require working with people beyond the department or outside the organization, but also to a general attitude of feeling energized in new experiences and situations (Briscoe et al., 2006). By promoting and sustaining active relationships with people from different departments of the organization, individuals are likely to develop affective bonds with employees within the same organization, as they create extensive internal networks. Nevertheless, this openness to the exterior may help those uncovering assorted options (Briscoe et al., 2006). Based on these considerations, we expect that:

*H5: There is a positive relationship between holding a boundaryless mindset and affective commitment.*

*H6: There is a negative relationship between holding a boundaryless mindset and continuance commitment*

The second boundaryless career attitude makes reference to the inclination of the individual towards physical mobility. In that sense, organizational mobility preference describes individual's strength of interest of remaining with a single or multiple employer(s). A person high on such an organizational mobility attitude "would be comfortable with or even prefer a career played out across several employers" (Briscoe et al., 2006: 31). Individuals experiencing organizational mobility preference are not inclined towards the predictability that comes with working continuously for the same organization and do not prefer to stay in a company they are familiar with instead of looking for employment opportunities elsewhere (Briscoe et al., 2006). Therefore, they are not expected to experience continuance commitment that primarily rises out of necessity, due to side-bets or to the perceived scarcity of available opportunities elsewhere. Similarly, individuals with a low preference towards organizational mobility are more risk-adverse and likely to experience a strong prevention focus, focused on security and safety, which is positively related with high continuance commitment (Meyer et al., 2004). Their predisposition to boundary-crossing may prevent these individuals to develop affective bonds with their current organization, and therefore we expect that:

*H7: There is a negative relationship between organizational mobility preference and affective commitment.*

*H8: There is a negative relationship between organizational mobility preference and continuance commitment.*

## **Method**

### **Sample**

Research data were collected using a web-based survey. The questionnaire was sent to 434 graduate and post-graduate distance learning students. An introduc-

tory letter of invitation was sent by email to the study participants. This invitation letter explained the purpose and significance of the study, emphasized voluntary participation and anonymity, and provided a hyperlink that took the participants to the survey website. The participants were asked to visit the survey website to fill out the questionnaire. Some days later, a postcard reminder was sent to the emailing addresses of the participants. The postcard reminded potential participants of the survey and encouraged them to participate in the study by using the hyperlink provided in the postcard reminder. Finally, 167 surveys were submitted by the respondents, representing a response rate of 38.48%.

The respondents (59.28% women and 40.72% men) were anonymous and they were employed at the time the study was conducted, as the questionnaire items were related to their current employment experience. The average age of the respondents was 31.22 years old ( $SD=7.27$ ). As regards the organizational size, most of them (44.31%) were working for small companies, whereas only a 12.57% were working in middle size companies and a significant percentage (43.11%) were employees of large companies. The average professional experience was 9.95 years ( $SD = 6.77$ ), with an average organizational tenure of 5.20 years ( $SD=5.38$ ). As regards the organizational size, most of them (44.32%) were working for small companies, whereas a significant percentage (43.11%) were employees of large companies and only a 12.57% were working in middle size companies. The highest level of education completed was a PhD (4.79%), while a 39.52% had completed a Bachelor's degree or a superior degree in engineering. The majority of the respondents had completed pre-university studies (55.69%).

## Measures

Protean career attitudes (self-direction in career management and values-driven predispositions) were measured using Briscoe et al. (2006)'s 8-item scale (sample item: *"I am responsible for my success or failure in my career"*) and 6-item scale respectively (sample item: *"I navigate my own career based on my personal priorities, as opposed to my employer's priorities"*). As far as boundaryless career attitudes are concerned, they were also assessed based on Briscoe et al. (2006)'s measures, as follows: an 8-item scale was used to assess boundaryless mindset (sample item: *"I seek job assignments that allow me to learn something new"*) and a 5-item scale to measure organizational mobility preference (sample item: *"I like the predictability that comes from working continuously for the same organization"*).

The two organizational commitment mindsets that were chosen as the focus of this study were measured using Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993)'s 6-items affective commitment ( $\alpha: 0.904$ ; sample item: *"This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me"*) and respectively continuance commitment scales ( $\alpha: 0.809$ ; sample item: *"Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire"*).

Information on demographic and background characteristics was collected to gain a deeper understanding of the composition of the sample. Demographic and background characteristics that were considered relevant to the present study included: age, gender, education level, years of professional experience, organizational tenure, and total number of employing organizations.

## Procedure

Data of this research was collected by means of a questionnaire sent to the sample study. As mentioned above, the original questionnaire items were constructed in English. Because the general language of the target population was Spanish, the questionnaire had to be translated into this language. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, we followed a translation, back-translation procedure (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Moreover, five cognitive interviews were conducted in order to ensure an accurate interpretation of the questionnaire items, as this technique allows understanding how respondents perceive and interpret questions, and to identify potential problems that may arise in prospective survey questionnaires (Drennan, 2003). Cognitive interviews permitted us interpreting which items are beyond the theoretical framework of the constructs to be analyzed (Collins, 2003; Jobe & Mingay, 1989). By means of verbal probing and thinking aloud (Drennan, 2003; Williamson, Ranyard, & Cuthbert, 2000) participants were asked to verbalize their interpretation of items and to paraphrase and/or comment on the wording of items in an effort to identify ambiguous or poorly worded questions. Once collected the data, they were processed following Miles and Huberman (1994)'s suggestions. More specifically, the interviewees were asked to comment on the clarity and readability of the each item by asserting why they assessed it with a certain punctuation, and which parts of the items they found difficult to answer or interpret. Based on their comments minor stylistic and semantic changes were made.

## Results

### Test of reliability and validity

Internal consistency was measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient and our research results support Briscoe et al. (2006)'s reported coefficients. The reliability analysis yielded alpha coefficients higher than 0.70. The underlying dimensions of protean (e.g. self-directed attitudes scale,  $\alpha=0.77$  and the values-driven one,  $\alpha=0.76$ ) and boundaryless career attitudes (boundaryless mindset,  $\alpha=0.86$  and organizational mobility preference  $\alpha=0.74$ ) yielded to similar internal consistencies as those reported by Briscoe et al. (2006) (namely: 0.81, 0.69, 0.89 and 0.75 respectively).

Finally, we performed reliability analysis for the two organizational commitment components selected, affective and continuance commitment, which both produced Alpha coefficients higher than .70. More specifically, the affective commitment scale reported an alpha coefficient of .91, while the continuance commitment scale

produced an alpha coefficient of 0.75. These results are consistent with previous with those obtained in a large diversity of studies, which reported internal consistencies comprised between 0.70 and 0.90 (Gellatly et al., 2006; Luchak & Gellatly, 2007; Powell & Meyer, 2004; Somers, 1995).

### **Regression analyses**

The hypothesized relationships between the underlying dimensions of boundaryless (boundaryless mindset and organizational mobility preference) and protean (self-direction and values driven) career attitudes were tested by means of hierarchical regression analysis. Checks of the theoretical assumptions underlying multiple regression were undertaken, including normality, linearity, and homoskedasticity. These assumptions were met and indeed and hence it can be asserted that multiple regression is quite robust to any violations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Table 1 below presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlation coefficients between the variables in this study. As evident in Table 1, none of the independent variables considered in the regression models were correlated above .70, suggesting an absence of multicollinearity. The fact that none of the tolerance levels were found to be less than .1 and, therefore, that all of the variance inflation factors (VIF) were less than 10, provided additional evidence that the variables were not collinear (Pallant, 2001).

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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Hypothesized relationships were tested using the hierarchical regression analysis. To compute the extent of additional variance explained by study variables, the regression analysis was performed by entering the control variables (demographic variables) in step 1, and protean and boundaryless career attitudes in step 2. Importance of embracing protean and boundaryless career attitudes in explaining affective and continuance commitment success can be demonstrated by examining the changes in  $R^2$  from step to step (Table 2).

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE  
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The first regression models were conducted in order to test the consequences of embracing protean and boundaryless career attitudes upon employees' affective commitment to their current companies (see Table 2).

Hypothesis 1 proposed that there will be a positive relation between self-direction in career management and individuals' affective commitment to their employing organizations. The  $\beta$  coefficient for self-direction is positive and statistically significant ( $\beta=0.19$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Accordingly, the data for this study indicate that self-

direction in career management contributes positively to psychological career success. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive relationship between values-driven predispositions and affective commitment, in the light of the regulatory focus theory. Nevertheless, the regression analysis presented in Table 2 illustrates that the  $\beta$  coefficient for values-driven is negative and statistically significant ( $\beta=-0.20$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), reflecting that strong values driven predispositions contribute negatively to experiencing affective commitment. Hence, hypothesis 3 does not receive support for this study.

Hypotheses 5 and 7 highlighted predicted relationships between boundaryless career attitudes and individuals' affective commitment. Regression analyses conducted to shed more light on these relationships reflect that the relation between boundaryless mindset and affective commitment is not significant ( $\beta=0.12$ , ns), while organizational mobility preference is negatively related to the same outcome ( $\beta=-0.36$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 5 was rejected and hypothesis 7 received full support.

Finally, regression analysis was conducted to explore the direct relationship between embracing protean and boundaryless career attitudes and individuals' continuance commitment to their employing organizations. Continuance commitment was first regressed on the control variables (demographic variables) followed by the four career attitudes in Step 2. The results are shown in Table 2.

The results indicate that continuance commitment had significant relationships with organizational mobility preference ( $\beta=-0.50$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and marginally significant with boundaryless mindset ( $\beta=0.15$ ,  $p<0.1$ ) and values-driven predispositions ( $\beta=-0.14$ ,  $p<0.1$ ). The relationship between self-direction in career management and the cost-avoidance commitment mindset was not significant. Therefore, H8 received full support, H4 and H6 received partial support and H2 was not supported.

Changes in  $R^2$  from Model 1 to Model 2 illustrate how much additional variance in affective and continuance commitment was explained by protean and boundaryless career attitudes ( $\Delta R^2=0.17$ , for affective commitment and  $\Delta R^2=0.24$ , for continuance commitment). Thus, the addition of career attitudes significantly explained more than 16% of affective and continuance commitment beyond what demographic variables explained.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The present study attempted to provide an insight upon the influence of boundaryless and protean career attitudes upon behavioural outcomes, and more specifically upon individuals' commitment to their employing organizations, as to date there has been little theoretical and empirical research testing proposed links.

As organizations move forward into a boundaryless environment, the ability to attract, engage, develop and retain talent will become increasingly important (Somaya & Williamson, 2008). Changes from transactional to transformational psychological contract highlight that individuals are now a less malleable resource for the organization and more active investors of their personal human capital (Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003), for enhancing opportunities for continuous learning, that will further ensure their future marketability. In a context in which employees perceive organizations as mere vehicles for their careers, we consider that an examination of the relation between new career orientations and organizational commitment is timely, as it provides novel insights for individuals and organizations and sheds more light upon labour relationships.

Research findings highlight the salience of protean and boundaryless career attitudes for individuals' affective commitment to their employing organizations. More specifically, self-direction in managing one's own career and vocational development contributes positively and significantly to individuals' emotional attachment to their organizations. As explained in the theoretical framework, self-reliance and proactivity in managing one's career and vocational destiny reflect a promotion focus, concerned with advancement, growth and accomplishment of maximum job requirements and associated with high affective commitment.

Furthermore, we have found a negative relationship between values-driven predispositions and affective commitment that determines the rejection of the hypothesis 3, albeit in the theoretical framework, we predicted a positive relationship between these two variables. This assertion was rooted on the consideration that a person who is not very clear on his or her values is more inclined to accept and adopt organizational values and for this reason he or she might be likely to develop affective bonds with the employing organization. Nevertheless, given the situation of an individual high on values-driven predispositions, it might be argued that the degree in which he or she experiences affective commitment depends on the extent to which his or her personal values match organizational values. Therefore, it seems that values-driven mindset per se cannot be directly related with affective commitment, as this relationship depends upon situational/contingent factors. However, it can be argued that a values-driven individual, who finds his or her ideal place in which to fulfill those values, is likely to develop a strong sense of "belonging" to the organization, and therefore, is expected to experience high affective commitment. Thus, the negative relationship between values driven predispositions and affective commitment, might be explained through the lack of value fit between individual values and organizational ones. Hence, future research is encouraged for examining the moderating effect of values-match upon the relationship between values-driven predispositions and affective commitment.

With respect to organizational mobility preference, research results illustrate a negative and statistically significant relationship with affective commitment, hence

supporting hypothesis 7. Individuals inclined towards crossing organizational boundaries are not expected to create affective bonds with their employing organization, due to their high preference for physical mobility.

With regard to continuance commitment, our research findings illustrate that organizational mobility preference is significant in predicting the commitment mindset associated with the perceived cost of leaving the organization. Organizational mobility preference was found to be negatively related to continuance commitment, as already predicted by the theoretical framework and the hypothesized links. This attitude makes reference to an individual's inclination towards physically crossing organizational boundaries, which may uncover him or her assorted options, which reduces the perceived scarcity of available alternatives on the external market.

Contrary to our expectations, boundaryless mindset ( $\beta=0.164$ ,  $p<0.1$ ) was found to be positively related with continuance commitment. Boundaryless mindset reflects openness to the exterior and individuals holding this attitude are feeling comfortable or even enthusiastic in promoting active relationships with people from different organizations, or located beyond one's current department. The relationship between boundaryless mindset and continuance commitment could be moderated by the extent to which individuals succeed in enhancing their social capital, which would in turn provide them access to the resources and the information other people possess and therefore help them discover different opportunities beyond organizational boundaries. In that sense, the relationship between holding a boundaryless mindset and continuance commitment would be negative if an individual's approach to creating and sustaining active relationships across organizational boundaries led to the enhancement of his or her internal and external networks. The moderating role of social capital in reducing continuance commitment represents an interesting future research line, which could bring a greater insight into the nature of this relationship. The relation between values driven and continuance commitment was found to be negative, suggesting that strong values driven predispositions reflect a promotion focus, which negatively affects one's commitment associated with the perceived cost of leaving.

There are several methodological limitations of the current study. First, cross-sectional correlational designs impede conclusive inferences regarding causal relationships among the study variables. Thus, statements regarding causal relationships need to be interpreted with caution. In order to overcome this limitation, future research should use longitudinal designs that permit more pertinent conclusions regarding the causal direction of the observed relationships. Second, the use of a sample of professionals attending distance learning business courses could limit the generalizability of the study findings, as the majority of the respondents were homogenous in terms of age and educational background. Therefore, future research might seek samples that are more heterogenous on these characteristics. Furthermore, as reflected in the study findings future research should examine the role social capital and values fit



may play upon the hypothesized relationships. Although the research findings suggest that these constructs may act as moderators in the hypothesized links, we believe that future research is needed for confirming these assertions. Finally, further research might expand the study to examine the relationship between protean and boundaryless career attitudes and work-related attitudes and behaviours (e.g. job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour, turnover, etc), that were found to be salient consequences of experiencing organizational commitment.

This study has several implications for organizations. Organizational career management is a complex issue, as a common concern in the organizational career management literature is whether providing career management interventions for employees determines them to be more committed to the organization, or whether in contrast it equips them to leave (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005; Sturges, Conway, & Liefvooghe, 2005; Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002). Sturges et al. (2005) have argued that if organizations facilitate career self-management, the outcomes tend to be more commitment and less turnover. Our research findings are consistent with these assertions, at least with respect to affective commitment. The relationship between self-direction and continuance commitment was not statistically significant; nevertheless, it is affective commitment that has been most often related with low organizational turnover. Thus, the research findings suggest that if organizations help their employees in career management, employees may become more commitment to their employing organizations, because they perceive that their organization values and supports them. It has been found that self-direction is not an innate trait, but rather a malleable competence which can be improved in a sustainable way (Verbruggen & Sels, 2008). In order to promote self-direction companies could organize workshops addressing the importance of pursuing self-set goals in contrast to assigned goals, persisting in reaching one's goal, anticipating problems and opportunities, and developing skills and competences in the current job (Agut, Peiró & Grau, in press). Moreover, promoting self-organizing teams and job redesign are specific strategies, directed to making employees more active regarding their work situation (Frese & Fay, 2001), for enhancing their affective commitment.

Strong values driven predispositions were found to be negatively related with both affective and continuance commitment, reinforcing the importance of finding a strong values fit between organizational and individual values for fostering and increasing individuals' commitment to their employing organizations. Workshops oriented at clarifying and communicating organizational values, philosophy and principles can be all beneficial for strengthening employees' commitment to the organization.

Individuals' preference towards inter-organizational mobility was found to contribute negatively to both commitment mindsets approached in this study. Practicing managers and organizational researchers argued that fostering organizational commitment is highly desirable and beneficial for organization (Shore, Barksdale, &

Shore, 1995). Employees with stronger commitment have been found to have less voluntary absenteeism (Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf, 1994; Meyer et al., 1993; Somers, 1995), to work harder and perform better (e.g., Bashaw & Grant, 1994), and to exhibit increased extra-role or “citizenship” behaviours (e.g., Munene, 1995; Pearce, 1993). Previous research suggested that organizations that elicit high commitment from mobile workers tend to focus less on traditional rewards and compensation and more on aligning workers’ different commitments, as for instance aligning career commitment and organizational commitment (Pittinsky & Shih, 2004). Future research should be devoted at examining how organizational commitment can be built and maintained through mobile workers, by re-examining the antecedents of affective and continuance commitment.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	31,22	7,27											
2. Gender	0,41	0,5	,36**										
3. Organizational size	1,99	0,94	,11	.35**									
4. Tenure	5,2	5,38	,64**	.30**	.19*								
5. Number of employing organizations	3,43	1,73	,12	.02	-.19*	-,18*							
6. Educational level	1,74	0,94	,25**	,27**	,13	,17*	,03						
7. Self-direction	32,51	4,25	,04	.04	-.21**	-.09	,22*	-,11					
8. Values-driven	21,6	4,01	.03	.02	-.01	.02	,10	-,01	,38**				
9. Boundaryless mindset	31,69	5,01	.08	.03	.10	-.05	.13	,00	.31**	,25**			
10. Organizational mobility preference	12,57	3,65	-.01	-.03	-.10	-.16*	,24**	,09	.12	.14	.33**		
11. Affective commitment	17,89	5,62	,12	.09	-.03	,16*	-.05	-,02	,11	-,14	-,00	-0,34**	
12. Continuance commitment	14,83	4,62	,20*	0,01	0,07	,24**	-0,12	-0,09	-0,04	-0,16	-0,04	-,50**	,52**

Table 2. Regression results

Independent variables	Standardized regression weights			
	Affective commitment		Continuance commitment	
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Step 1				
Age	.05	.03	.16	.16
Gender	.07	.04	-.07	-.08
Organizational size	-.08	-.08	.04	.00
Tenure	.13	.12	.16	.10
No of employing organizations	-.05	.00	-.10	-.01
Education	-.06	.01	-.14	-.08
$\Delta R^2$	.03		.09	
F	1.055		2.871*	
Step 2				
Self-direction		.19*		.03
Values-driven		-.20*		-.14.
Boundaryless mindset		.12		.15.
Organizational mobility preference		-.36***		-.50***
$\Delta R^2$		.17		.24
$R^2$ total		.20		.33
F		3.864***		7.684***
Note: . p<.01; *p<.05, **p<.01; ***p<.001				

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