"Crafting your own success": A time-lagged study on the mediating role of job crafting dimensions in the relationship between protean career and career success

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TITLE PAGE

"Crafting your own success": A time-lagged study on the mediating role of job crafting dimensions in the relationship between protean career and career success

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Abstract

Purpose. As the notions of protean career and job crafting share a common emphasis on self-management, proactivity, and customization, this study aimed to examine if the associations between protean career, subjective, and objective career success were mediated by job crafting, assessed via its three main dimensions (i.e., increasing structural job resources, increasing social job resources, and increasing challenging job demands).

Methodology. We sampled 594 Italian employees using a time-lagged research design: protean career was assessed at T1, job crafting and career success at T2. Responses were analyzed through structural equation modeling.

Findings. Increasing structural job resources mediated the association of protean career with subjective career success, while increasing challenging job demands mediated its association with objective career success.

Originality. In contrast to previous studies, in this contribution the mediating role of job crafting is disentangled by taking into account its three respective dimensions. Additionally, we included both forms of career success as outcomes of protean career. Implications for future research and practical recommendations are presented and discussed.

Keywords: protean career, job crafting, subjective career success, objective career success.

Article classification: research paper.

Introduction

Nowadays, as a response to the progressive organizational disinvestment in employees' career development (Li *et al.,* 2021), an agentic perspective has arisen pushing individuals to take charge of their own careers, hence leading to several beneficial outcomes for them (Akkermans and Tims, 2017) and, to a less studied degree, their organizations (Cenciotti et al., 2017). At the same time, traditional top-down job design systems have proven insufficient to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of contemporary jobs (Hu *et al.,* 2021), suggesting that bottom-up approaches that inspire employees to proactively design their own jobs, such as job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), should not be dismissed. More specifically, job crafting, being an important example of such a bottom-up approach, involves self-initiated changes that individuals make in their job design (Tims *et al.,* 2012) contributing to create work environments that, by meeting their needs and their abilities, lead to better work performances (Tims and Bakker, 2010).

Recently, Federici *et al.* (2021) advocated integrating contemporary career and job design literatures, arguing that these have been treated as unconnected research domains for too long. In this vein, the protean career orientation and job crafting share a common emphasis on self-directedness, proactivity, and personalization that have been seldom juxtaposed (Kundi *et al.,* 2020), and thus deserve additional scholarly attention as they could lead to positive outcomes for both the individual (e.g., career success) and the organization (e.g., productivity). On that basis, we aim at contributing to the career and job crafting literature by examining the links between protean career, job crafting behaviors, and career success. As job crafting has not been often examined in connection to career success (Kim and Beehr, 2017) and, with in particular a lack of attention for the protean career attitude construct (Kundi *et al*., 2020), in this contribution we stress the importance of empirically bridging these concepts in scholarly work.

Based on these considerations, we posit that an individual attitude that is aimed at directing and customizing one's career (i.e., a protean career attitude) may be easily followed and enhanced by a congruent and more specific need to craft and customize one's job (i.e., job crafting). We

would argue that in the age of "the great resignation" in which individuals are questioning everything about how they work, a more specific understanding about how job crafting may enhance freedom of choice and value-fulfilment is of critical importance. Given the unique characteristics that influence their own individual choices and preferences in the workplace, the chance to craft one's own job increases the probability of reaching better performance and achieving career success (Akkermans and Tims, 2017).

Protean career focuses on people's ability to direct their own career and to make career choices based upon their personal values (Briscoe and Hall, 2006), taking responsibility for planning and managing their career according to their own inclinations (Hall and Las Heras, 2009). Several studies show that the protean career is positively related to both subjective and objective career success (Volmer and Spurk, 2011), but up till now we do not know whether this is only a direct link or whether additional intervening, mediating variables can be helpful in achieving even greater career success (Sultana and Malik, 2019). If the protean career idea connects to the possibility of guiding, customizing, and shaping one's career, based on one's own personal needs and priorities, *job crafting* represents a more focused attitude, centering on the opportunity to shape and craft one's own job, ultimately making it more sustainable. In fact, job crafting is considered to be a process with which individuals redesign their work, by means of attitudes and behaviors aimed at modifying and improving their work resources and performance (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), through the customization of work tasks, social networks, and challenging tasks assignments (Tims *et al.,* 2012). More recently, Tims *et al.* (2022) argued that job crafting has become a highly promising research subject that deserves further empirical efforts given its positive outcomes in terms of higher work engagement (Brenninkmeijer and Hekkert-Koning, 2015), performance (Hulshof *et al.,* 2020), and so on.

Based on the abovementioned evidence (e.g., Volmer and Spurk, 2011), HRM professionals and theorists are now aware that allowing and even encouraging self-directed career behavior may contribute to heightening employee career success (both in subjective and objective terms).

However, we believe that in terms of practice and theory there is further value to be added to employees' career success (Sultana and Malik, 2019). Here, we posit that job crafting behaviors, which share with the protean idea the focus on proactivity, responsibility, and customization albeit to a more specific level (i.e., one's own job, instead of career), represent a supplementary aspect that could fruitfully be integrated into HRM processes to nurture employees' career success. Said differently, we assume that encouraging employees to more specifically customize both their jobs and careers, beyond protean behaviors, may have beneficial effects on their career success.

Hence, our study responds to the call for more research that connects the fields of jobs and careers (Akkermans and Tims, 2017; Federici *et al.,* 2021), aiming to make two main contributions. First, to the best of our knowledge, as earlier research in the career studies field examined job crafting only as a whole construct (e.g., Kundi *et al.,* 2020), we will examine it through its subdimensions as such an approach can provide novel information about those specific job crafting aspects (e.g., developing social networks, autonomy, responsibility, etc.) that are more salient for protean individuals for reaching higher career success. Second, while Kundi and colleagues (2020) highlighted that protean career attitudes were related to subjective career success, with overall job crafting being the mediator in this relationship, we will examine their associations also with objective career success as no previous work has established the link between these variables.

Theoretical background

Briscoe and Hall (2006) argued that the protean career attitude encompassed two specific dimensions: *values-driven,* defined as the person's internal values which provide the guide and measure of success for the individual's career, and *self-directedness,* which concerns managing the person's career, referring to the ability to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning needs. Apart from predicting career success, the protean attitude has also been positively related to several, intermediate, proactive career-related behaviors such as career self-management (De Vos and Soens, 2008) and career crafting (Lee *et al.,* 2021), while its association with job crafting has been examined to a lesser extent.

The concept of job crafting was introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), when they realized that employees may exert effort to align their personal characteristics with their job, by changing the physical, cognitive and relational boundaries of their work activities to make it meaningful and satisfying. In particular, Zang and Parker (2019) distinguished two types of job crafting strategies: *approach crafting* leads to gaining positive and desirable outcomes, such as seeking learning opportunities, whereas *avoidance crafting* focuses on diminishing those aspects that are stressful and prevent negative outcomes, such as making mentally demanding tasks easier to perform. Previous studies showed that avoidance approach is related to negative attitudes (Rudolph *et al.,* 2017), burnout (Harju *et al.,* 2021), etc. Instead, approach crafting is related to higher engagement (Federici *et al.,* 2021), a better performance (Dubbelt *et al.,* 2019), etc. However, several scholars called for further studies shedding light on how approach crafting leads to other desired outcomes (Teng, 2019).

Tims and colleagues (2012) operationalized job crafting via three dimensions that are consistent with the *approach* crafting idea: increasing structural resources, increasing social resources, and increasing challenging demands. The first dimension consists of all those episodes in which workers try to modify the cognitive and physical characteristics of their work activities (e.g., demanding for a greater autonomy). The second dimension refers to changes in one's work-related social relationships (e.g., creating new relationships). The third one concerns those episodes in which employees increase their job demands to improve personal growth (e.g., taking the initiative to have greater responsibilities). They also theorized a fourth dimension, namely, decreasing hindering job demands, which pertains to performing behaviours aimed at minimizing the physical, cognitive, and emotional strains of the job to meet individual needs and abilities. We did not include it as it relates to the *avoidance* approach which is more reactive than proactive, and because its operationalization has been criticized (Rudolph *et al.,* 2017).

So far, several studies in the scholarly field of careers, examined job crafting as an unidimensional construct (Cheng *et al.,* 2022). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies

separately analyzed the three approach dimensions of job crafting in the context of the association between the protean career construct and career success. Furthermore, it remains unclear how the *approach* dimension of job crafting, which is directed toward actions aimed at enhancing positive aspects of work by expanding and enriching job's boundaries as well as seeking challenges and resources at work (Zhang and Parker, 2019), promotes career success. Finally, focusing on these three separate job crafting dimensions, instead of the whole construct, could be helpful in tailoring specific interventions by targeting those peculiar dimensions that may have proved to be significant mediators, thus resulting in savings of time and money.

As workers' behaviors (i.e., job crafting) are understood to be guided by individual characteristics and attitudes (i.e., protean career) and by situational aspects, the present study considers the protean career construct as an antecedent of the three dimensions of job crafting which, in turn, may mediate its effect on career success. Said differently, protean individuals may exert their push to responsibility and personalization not only on their broader career but also on their daily job activities, resulting in a further increased career success that overruns the single attention on being a protean individual.

Hypotheses development

Career success is generally defined as the "achievement of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experience over time" (Arthur *et al.,* 2005, p.179). Traditionally, career success has been considered in terms of objectively verifiable criteria (i.e., objective career success) such as status achieved in the organization, and professional level or salary (Spurk *et al.,* 2019). However, the constant changes which characterize the contemporary work environment and the emergence of new career models (e.g., the sustainable career paradigm; De Vos *et al.,* 2020) showed that individuals are able to conduct their own evaluations of their careers, using their personal values, beliefs and aspirations, and using their own self as point of reference (e.g., life satisfaction, perceived safety, opportunities to be creative; Shen *et al*., 2015; i.e., subjective career success).

As protean individuals are able to self-manage and self-direct their own career (Briscoe and Hall, 2006), engage in continuous learning activities and develop job-relevant competencies, they should be able to more easily achieve objective career success, as showed by several studies (e.g., Sultana and Malik, 2019). Furthermore, there is also evidence for a significant relationship between protean career and subjective career success (e.g., De Vos and Soens, 2008). However, it must be noted that, until now, only a limited number of studies simultaneously examined and found support for both facets of career success as an outcome of protean career (Lo Presti and Elia, 2020).

Some other scholarly work examined the association between job crafting and career success (Kim and Beehr, 2017). Moreover, different studies included job crafting as a mediator; in particular, Cenciotti and colleagues (2017) reported that job crafting mediated the relationship between psychological capital and career success, highlighting the key role of crafting behaviors to translate psychological resources into career success. Similarly, Akkermans and Tims (2017) found that job crafting mediated the association between career competencies and perceived employability, thus highlighting the role of job crafting as a transforming process to optimize desired career outcomes. Finally, Wai Sei and Lin Dar (2019) found that job crafting mediated the effect of protean career on employability. All in all, it must be noted that job crafting is usually used as a composite index in most studies obfuscating any differential associations between its three facets and the related variables.

First, job crafting entails increasing structural resources which means requesting a greater variety of tasks, and striving for more autonomy and job control (Bakker *et al.,* 2012). Following Hall and Las Heras (2009), who argued that protean individuals are self-directed and are more likely to seek jobs that allow them to develop autonomy, we assume that job crafting behaviors will be linked to a protean career. Protean individuals are motivated to orient their careers around personal values, motivations and needs (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). Furthermore, different studies highlighted that protean individuals are more likely to be more employable (e.g., Cortellazzo *et al.,*

2020). Wai Sei and Lin Dar (2019) also argued that individuals who change the structure of their activities are more likely to achieve career success.

Based on this outline, we assume that the well-established positive association between protean career and subjective and objective career success will be mediated by increasing structural resources, as protean individuals will be more likely to assume more tasks and to develop more job autonomy, and these aspects are generally associated with higher career success. Hence, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: Increasing structural resources will mediate the positive association between protean career, on the one side, and (a) subjective and (b) objective career success on the other side.

Besides, when individuals increase their social resources, they try to develop their social networks to count on more and diversified social support (Bakker *et al.,* 2012). Yang and colleagues (2011) argued that social capital developed by proactive individuals works as an extended self that allows them to expand their capacity for action. The concept of social capital is linked to the actions that a crafter puts in place to increase their social resources: feedback, creation of a network, and social support (Yang *et al.,* 2011). Earlier studies already highlighted the positive association between social capital and career success (Richardson *et al.,* 2017). Furthermore, Morrison (2002) found that having a broader friendship network was positively correlated with social integration, and that having a wider information network was associated with greater organizational knowledge and mastery of tasks. Likewise, workplace social networking has a positive influence on career success (Spurk *et al.,* 2019).

Protean career behavior has been characterized as social networking and information seeking (Gubler *et al.,* 2014). Therefore, building and maintaining relationships with others results in a larger network that people can turn to for social support, ideas, advice, or sponsorship, and this can be linked to a greater chance of achieving success. In sum, protean individuals will also more frequently engage in behaviors aimed at increasing their social capital and will utilize that resource to further foster their career success. Accordingly, we formulate the following:

H2: Increasing social job resources will mediate the positive association between protean career, and (a) subjective and (b) objective career success.

Finally, increasing challenging demands is related to undertaking additional tasks or to more responsibilities (Bakker *et al.,* 2012). Despite different studies that indicated how an increase in job demands leads to negative health effects and lowered performance (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011), Van den Broeck and collegues (2010) posited that some job demands may be associated with positive outcomes, as employees can view these demands as personal benefits in case they are able to overcome them. Ryan and Deci (2000) claimed that individuals may be more likely to pursue proactive goals when they want to increase their challenges at work, as these challenges can satisfy their needs for competence and autonomy. In general, employees who are more proactive and adaptive in their jobs tend to put more effort in crafting their work activities, and are more able to achieve desired career success (Tims and Knight, 2019). Said differently, protean individuals may engage in increasing their challenging work demands as a means to realize their full potential, and to increase the likelihood of career success. Based on the above-mentioned evidence and arguments, we formulate the following:

H3: Increasingly challenging job demands will mediate the positive association between the protean career and (a) subjective and (b) objective career success.

Figure 1 depicts our empirical model.

--- FIGURE 1 APPROX HERE ---

Method

Participants and procedure

Seven hundred and twelve Italian employees were recruited by contacting several public and private organizations, that were located in Southern Italy. Those who agreed received a weblink to the questionnaire and were invited to fill it in over the next two weeks (Time 1). After about 4 months[1],

[1] This time lag was chosen to avoid any interference to organizational processes due to a close-range data collection as well as to further reduce the common method variance bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

participants received a second questionnaire through a weblink (Time 2) and were invited to fill it out. In total, 625 online questionnaires were returned (attrition rate = 12.3%). After careful inspection of these returned questionnaires, 29 questionnaires were removed because they were only partially filled out. The final sample consisted of 594 employees.

Participants who only filled out the Time 1 questionnaire were significantly older, while there were no differences in regards to tenure, educational level, and employment contract. Moreover, those who only filled out the Time 1 questionnaire held more frequently top managerial positions than blue collar positions, and were more frequently employed in the tertiary sector than in the secondary one.

As for gender, 313 (52.7%) participants were men, and their mean age was 45.01 years (SD = 12.35). Thirty-nine (6.6%) respondents had an up to junior high school degree, 263 (44.3%) had a high school degree, and 285 (48.0%) had a university degree or above (7 missing values; 1.2%). Five hundred and eighteen participants (87.2%) had a permanent employment contract, 70 (11.8%) had a fixed-term contract, and only 6 (1.0%) had a temporary one. Average organizational tenure was 15.87 years (SD = 11.86). Ninety-six respondents (16.2%) were blue-collar workers, 400 (67.3%) were white-collars or technicians, 61 (10.3%) were middle-managers, while 33 (5.6%) where top managers (four missing values; 0.7%). Finally, seven workers (1.2%) were employed in the primary sector, 117 (19.7%) in the secondary one, while 470 (79.1%) worked in the tertiary one. Their average tenure in their entire career was 21.89 years (SD = 11.72).

In terms of representativeness, our sample mirrored the Italian national statistics regarding gender, employment contract and, to a lesser extent, economic sector. Conversely, our sample included employees with a higher educational level as well as higher percentages of white collars or technicians, middle and top managers.

Measures

Protean career. We used the Italian version (Lo Presti *et al.,* 2011) of the Protean Career Attitude Scale (Briscoe *et al.,* 2006). It includes two dimensions: self-directed career management (eight

items; e.g., "I am responsible for my success or failure in my career") and value-driven orientation (six items; e.g., "In the past I have sided with my own values when the company has asked me to do something I don't agree with"). Responses were collected via a five-point rating scale (ranging from 1 = "completely false" to 5 = "completely true"). Cronbach's α was .81.

Job crafting dimensions were measured via the Job Crafting Scale by Bakker and colleagues (2012; Italian version by Cenciotti *et al.,* 2016) that comprises three subdimensions. Specifically, increasing structural job resources was assessed through four items (e.g., "I make sure that I use my capacities to the fullest"), increasing social job resources was assessed through four items (e.g., "I ask others for feedback on my job performance"), while increasing challenging job demands was assessed through five items (e.g., "I try to make my work more challenging by examining the underlying relationships between aspects of my job"). Cronbach's α was .88, .83, and .83, respectively. Responses were collected via a seven-point rating scale (ranging from 0 = "never" to 6 = "always").

Subjective career success (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007; Italian version by Lo Presti *et al.,* 2018) was assessed through eight items (e.g., "I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals") using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). Cronbach's α was .91.

Objective career success was assessed through a scale developed originally by Lo Presti and Elia (2020) that consists of three items (i.e., "I had job advancements", "I increased my income", "I reached senior, or in any case relevant, higher hierarchical positions") and assessed the extent to which respondents, in the last ten years, reached these objectives comparatively lower or higher than their colleagues. Responses were collected through a five-point rating scale (ranging from 1 = "well below my colleagues" to 5 = "well above my colleagues". Cronbach's α was .79.

Data analysis

Missing values (.003% of all expected cells for Time 1 scales, .006% for the Time 2 ones) were replaced Through the Expectation Maximization method (Schlomer *et al.,* 2010).

As for the data analysis sequence, we initially tested if the included variables were adequately distinct from each other and whether their measurement was not biased by, for instance, common-method variance (Podsakoff *et al.,* 2003). A series of three confirmatory factor analyses were run (estimation method: Maximum Likelihood) after verifying for adequate asymmetry and kurtosis indices. Fit indices that minimized the likelihood of Type I and Type II errors (Kline, 2015) were selected. In particular, these included the chi-square test (χ^2), the comparative fit index (CFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the standardized root mean residual (SRMR), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; with 95% confidence interval lower and upper limits, hereafter 95% CI [LL, UL]).

After obtaining the final measurement model, Cronbach's alphas and zero-order correlations were used to assess the scales' internal consistencies and to examine associations between pairs of continuous variables. Spearman's rho correlations were used with respect to the association between educational level and other continuous variables, while point-biserial correlations were used with regard to gender.

Finally, structural models concerning the associations between the study variables under interest were estimated through structural equation modelling analyses (Lisrel 9.3), using Maximum Likelihood estimation methods (along with the indicators' covariance matrix), to examine direct and indirect associations. Finally, tests of statistical power of the dependent variables' R^2s were computed by means of G-Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul *et al.,* 2009)

Results

Measurement models

Items' asymmetry ranged between -1.08 and -.02, while kurtosis varied from -.1.47 to .55, showing that the assumptions of normality were not violated (Kline, 2015).

A measurement model containing all items loading on a single factor (M1) was contrasted with a model containing the items loading on their respective factors (M2). As can be seen in Table

1, a remarkable improvement was observable from M1 to M2, although M2's goodness-of-fit indexes were still not fully satisfactory.

--- TABLE 1 APPROX HERE ---

However, a closer inspection of the factor loadings showed that six factor loadings of the protean career scale (two from the self-directed career management subscale, and four from the value-driven orientation subscale[2]) were lower than the threshold of .40. So, a new measurement model (M3) was estimated without these six items. This final model showed better goodness-of-fit indexes and was retained for subsequent analyses. It is possible that the six above-mentioned items showed lower loadings in this empirical study because of cultural reasons, in particular the well-known low inter-organizational mobility of Italian employees (Sammarra *et al.,* 2013), as well as the importance of social networks (e.g., family and friends) for Italian job seekers (Mandrone, 2011) when finding a new job is concerned. Many dropped items refer to the value-driven protean career orientation subscale, which is consistent with Li *et al.,* (2021), who noted that this dimension is more beneficial and relevant in Anglo societies than in others. Moreover, this also connects to some criticisms that have been made with regard to the psychometric properties of the scale we used (Baruch, 2014), which implies that further empirical examinations in different cultural contexts is needed. Cronbach's alpha for the reduced protean career scale was .80.

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics along with correlations for all model variables.

--- TABLE 2 APPROX HERE ---

The study variables were all positively associated with each other, consistently with the hypotheses.

[2] The removed six items were: "When development opportunities have not been offered by my company, I've sought them out on my own", "It doesn't matter much to me how other people evaluate the choices I make in my career", "In the past I have sided with my own values when the company has asked me to do something I don't agree with", "I navigate my own career, based on my personal priorities, as opposed to my employer's priorities", "I'll follow my own conscience if my company asks me to do something that goes against my values", and "In the past I have relied more on myself than others to find a new job when necessary".

Direct and indirect associations

A structural model was estimated, including all hypothesized relationships between our study variables. The three job crafting dimensions, as well as subjective and objective career success, were left free to correlate with each other.

Initial goodness-of-fit indexes (χ^2 = 1377.22, df = 451, RMSEA = .06 [.05, .06], CFI = .91, NNFI = .90, SRMR = .06) were acceptable, however the modification indexes suggested that apart from the indirect associations, protean career could also be directly associated with both subjective and objective career success. Thus, a second structural model (see Figure 2) was estimated, including these two direct links. As a result, the goodness-of-fit indexes (χ^2 = 1350.15, df = 449, RMSEA = .06 [.05, .06], CFI = .91, NNFI = .90, SRMR = .05) showed an improvement, considering that the χ^2/df difference (27.07/2 df) between the two structural models was statistically significant ($p < .001$), and thus led to the retaining of this latter model (see Figure 2).

--- FIGURE 2 APPROX HERE ---

Protean career was found to be positively related with Increasing structural job resources, Increasing challenging job demands, Subjective and Objective career success. Moreover, Increasing structural job resources was positively related with Subjective career success, while Increasing challenging job demands was positively related with Objective career success.

In regards to the indirect effects, Increasing structural job resources appeared to mediate (β = .06, $p < .001$) the association between Protean career and Subjective career success (herewith supporting Hypothesis 1a), while Increasing structural job resources did not mediate (β = .01, *ns*) the association between Protean career and Objective career success (herewith not supporting Hypothesis 1b).

Furthermore, Increasing social job resources did not mediate the association between Protean career, on the one hand, and Subjective career success (β = .01 , *ns*) and Objective career success (β = <.01 , *ns*), on the other hand, herewith not supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

Lastly, Increasing challenging job demands did not mediate (β = .02, *ns*) the association between Protean career and Subjective career success (herewith not supporting Hypothesis 3a), while Increasing challenging job demands was found to mediate (β = .05, $p < .001$) the association between Protean career and Objective career success (herewith supporting Hypothesis 3b).

Tests of statistical power returned values of .99 or higher for all dependent variables' R^2s except for Increasing social job resources (Power = .38).

Discussion

The present research was meant to add to the scientific knowledge by linking the notion of protean career to both subjective and objective career success, using the theoretical lens of job crafting theory (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). More specifically, our study contributes to the available literature in two ways primarily. First, we examined job crafting not as an unidimensional construct (Tims and Parker, 2020) but differentiated between its three main *approach* dimensions. In doing so, we were able to further investigate a possible mediational paths through which protean individuals can obtain subjective and objective career success, as well as gain more insights into which specific job crafting dimensions are more prevalent among protean workers. Second, we examined the relationships between these three *approach* job crafting dimensions and either subjective or objective career success, whose differential associations have not been examined up to now (Kundi *et al.,* 2020).

Theoretical implications

Our study makes three main theoretical contributions to the job crafting literature.

First, we advance the scholarly knowledge on the relationship between protean career and job crafting by showing that their positive association can be differentiated if job crafting is assessed as a multidimensional variable, contrary to previous studies (Kundi *et al.,* 2020). In doing so, we focused on the three *approach* crafting dimensions, as these are generally associated with positive outcomes, contrary to *avoidance* crafting (Harju *et al.,* 2021). More specifically, protean individuals seem to be more willing to seek opportunities that allow them to obtain a greater variety

of tasks, develop job autonomy, and shape their work activities (Bakker *et al.,* 2012). This is consistent with the work by Hall and Las Heras (2009) who argued that an individual's self-directedness leads them to seek jobs that allow to develop autonomy and control as well as manage and more specifically customize such jobs (i.e., increasing structural job resources). Moreover, from our study it appeared that protean individuals are more prone to increase the degree and number of challenging job demands, such as undertaking more complex tasks or responsibilities. It is likely that protean individuals see these more challenging tasks and responsibilities as opportunities for satisfying their needs for competency and autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Surprisingly, protean career did not contribute to increasing social job resources, so it seems that protean individuals do not attach much importance to developing and nurturing their social networks within their work contexts. This also points to the potentially revealing of an intuitive idea about self-directed individuals, that they are not inclined to avail themselves of social resources. This may be seen as a strength by some, but certainly could be a limitation as well, especially in cultures that rely more upon the social web. We consider this a ripe area for further research.

Second, we add to the literature on the associations between job crafting facets and career success by showing that these facets are differentially associated with subjective and objective career success. In fact, we found that looking for and developing more autonomy and enriching one's tasks can lead to heightened satisfaction towards one's career success (Wai Sei and Lin Dar, 2019) because it can be seen as a personal accomplishment which has a positive impact on one's career. Conversely, undertaking additional and challenging tasks or more responsibilities was found to foster objective career success, probably because it provides the employee opportunities for professional development and can signal to their supervisors the individual's readiness to fulfill higher job positions (Tims and Knight, 2019). As employees' expectations of their employers are changing (Shen *et al.,* 2015), and thus their preferences towards more subjective indicators of career success, over and above more objective ones, it becomes compelling for HRM professionals to further differentiate between those factors that may play a role in predicting each facet of career

success to better attract, motivate, and retain those employees that appear more prone to job crafting activities.

Third, our findings enrich the literature concerning the role of job crafting as a mediator (Wai Sei and Lin Dar, 2019) by showing that directing one's career and following one's own values (i.e., protean career), instead of organizational ones, may not only directly increase both objective and subjective career success, but, at the same time, may have an effect through the search for more variety and autonomy in one's own job (i.e., increasing structural resources, with respect to subjective career success), or through the search for more responsibilities and challenges (i.e., increasing challenging job demands, with respect to objective career success). This evidence further supports Hall and Las Heras' (2010) claim that the domains of job and careers are not as distinct as they may appear to be at a first glance. As also underlined by Federici *et al.,* (2021), jobs are building blocks of one's career, and careers result from the synthesis of different job experiences. We posit that career success, either being an agentic drive or an organizational strategy, can be promoted through taking into consideration both job design approaches and career preferences.

Practical implications

It is recommended that HRM professionals recognize their employees' protean orientations, and support them in further developing these in order to enable them to take individual responsibility for career management. Complementarily, HRM professionals should also focus on tailor-made HRM interventions for non-protean employees and help them to increase their self-directedness, proactivity and adaptivity, as they suffer the risk of being less able to cope with organizational and environmental stresses and turbulences. As previous studies (e.g., Zhang *et al.,* 2022) suggested, both intra- (e.g., training) and extra-organizational (e.g., career counseling) interventions may be implemented to support individuals in clarifying their values and priorities, enhance their ability to scan the occupational environment, develop vocational skills related to career self-directedness, planning, and insight, etc.

Moreover, it is recommended to promote job crafting behaviors through appropriate interventions. Regarding top-down interventions, Van Wingerden *et al.* (2017) suggested that senior and line management can pay additional attention to their employees' needs in regards to their job resources and challenges, for instance by means of individual conversations with their staff members, through surveys or focus groups, or even by adjusting their performance management cycle by including job demands and resources to individuals' performance reviews. Overall, managers may develop HRM systems that motivate employees to maintain or increase employee's self-directedness, autonomy, and customization. Furthermore, organizational support programs (e.g., mentoring, feedback, on-the-job training) are meant to encourage employees to work in ways that ensure their learning and skills' improvement. Moreover, organizations can also offer customized work arrangements to their employees (i.e., I-Deals) that can focus on different aspects such as flexibility, further career development, workload-reduction, and tasks (Liao *et al.,* 2016).

However, whereas top-down interventions target the same job characteristics for all employees, bottom-up approaches put much greater importance upon taking into account individual differences, fostering active participation, and encouraging workers to take more control themselves over their specific job demands and resources (Van den Heuvel *et al*., 2015). For instance, Gordon (2014) developed a training program by integrating a new 'thinking-in-action' approach with the so-called Situated Experiential Learning Narratives in which employees created job crafting goals based on their own or others' real-life experiences. In doing so, they build on stories of how proactive behaviors had changed their attitudes or relationships with their jobs.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that job crafting is not always feasible; in fact, even if everyone would craft his/her own job to focus on the interesting and fulfilling parts of it, some of the elements/tasks of one's job may still remain annoying and boring although still need to be accomplished. In other terms, the possibilities to craft one's own job depend on the job itself, as well as on organizational constraints.

Limitations

Some limitations need to be acknowledged when interpreting our results. First, we used a reduced version of the protean career attitude scale, which can limit the comparability of our results with other studies. Second, the inclusion of additional mediators (e.g., career crafting) may provide more detailed information about the differential paths through which protean career leads to career success, as well as the inclusion of potential moderators (e.g., organizational sensitivity to, and opportunities for, job crafting efforts, career stage of respondents) may shed light on the boundary conditions in which job crafting plays a meaningful role. Third, as a time-lagged research design is not the ideal situation for testing mediated associations, future studies should be carried out through three wave cross-lagged research designs.

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Table 1. Measurement models.

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	NNFI	SRMR
M1	7192.85	665	.13 [.13, .13]	.39	.36	.13
M2	2078.37	650	.06 [.06, .06]	.87	.86	.06
M3	1350.15	449	.06 [.05, .06]	.91	.90	.05

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations.

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1) Gender[1]	-	-						
2) Organizational tenure	15.87 (11.86)	-.12**	-					
3) Protean career	3.55 (.82)	.10*	-.14**	-				
4) Increasing structural job resources	4.40 (1.08)	.14**	-.03	.25***	-			
5) Increasing social job resources	2.85 (1.33)	-.10*	-.14**	.08	.17***	-		
6) Increasing challenging job demands	3.81 (1.02)	.05	.01	.22***	.63***	.39***	-	
7) Subjective career success	3.32 (.88)	.05	-.03	.25***	.37***	.21***	.34***	-
8) Objective career success	2.89 (.83)	-.01	-.05	.14***	.20***	.14***	.24***	.49***

Note: [1] 0 = man, 1 = woman; *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

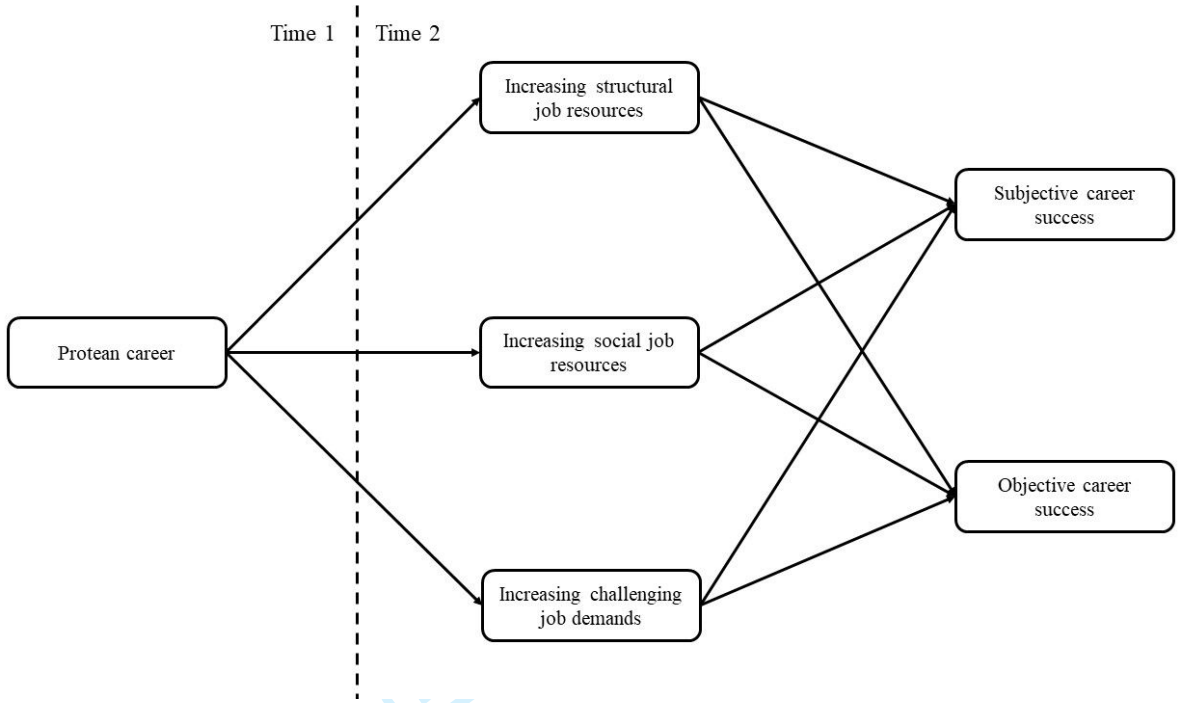

Figure 1. Empirical model.

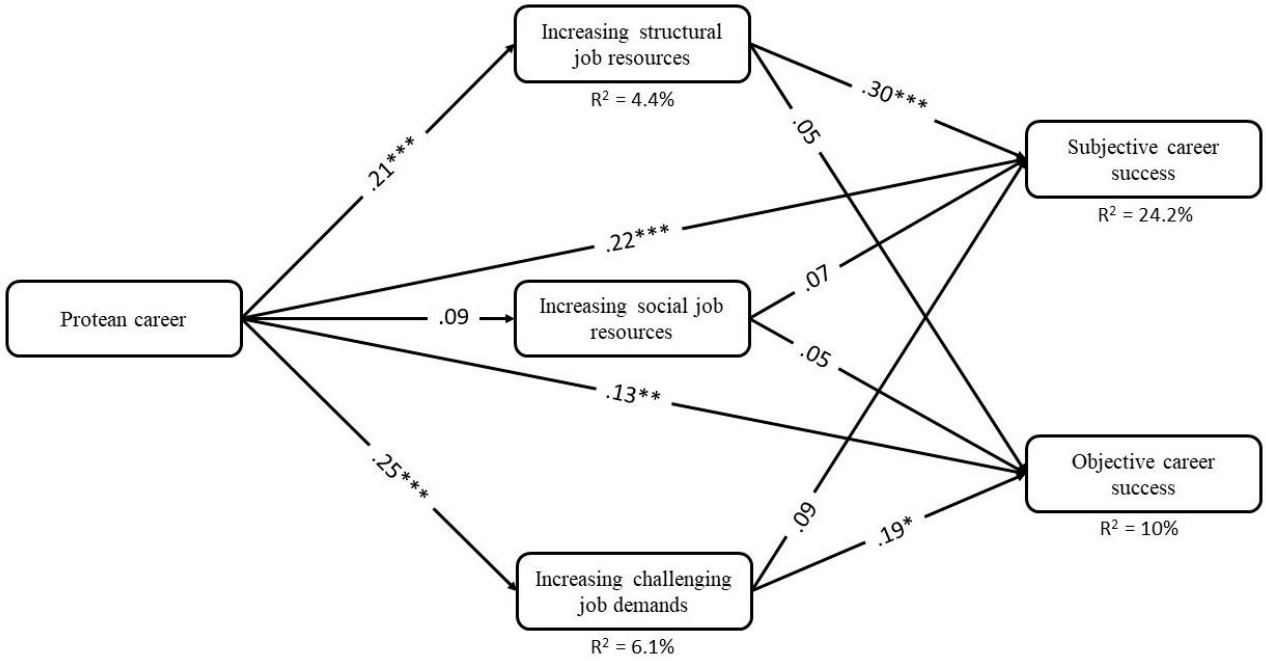

Figure 2. Structural model.

Note: R^2 for Increasing social job resources = 0.8%.