

Demographic Differences in Protean Career Behavior: A Study of a High Demographic Inequality Labor Market

Ikhlas A. Abdalla¹, Moudi A. Al Homoud¹ & Ali A. Muhammad¹

¹ Department of Management and Marketing, College of Business Administration, Kuwait University, Kuwait

Corresponding author at: Ikhlas Abdalla. Department of Management and Marketing, College of Business Administration, Kuwait University, P.O. Box 5486 Safat 13055, Kuwait. E-mail: iabdalla@cba.edu.kw

Received: May 19, 2019

Accepted: June 20, 2019

Online Published: July 7, 2019

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v14n8p25

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v14n8p25>

Abstract

The protean career concept is dominating recent career research. Demographic groups are postulated to differ on protean career behavior with implications for career development, social equity and management of an increasingly diversified workforce. The purpose of this paper is to explore the unique contributions of employees' gender, nationality, sector and age in the deployment of career advancement strategies in the high demographic inequality labor market of Kuwait. This is one of the few studies with an exclusive focus on demographic differences in protean behavior. Most protean career research treats demographic difference as an ancillary focus, even though demographic differences are part of the foundation of psychological sciences. The study utilized a set of questionnaires on a sample of 908 highly educated young employees working in Kuwait. Primary findings are that there are greater demographic differences in protean career in Kuwait than in the West. Men, Kuwaitis, private sector and younger employees deploy significantly more career advancement strategies and have stronger strategy orientations than women, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), civil servants and older employees. The results are attributed to contextual inequalities in opportunities because they echo the Kuwaiti segmented labor market by gender, nationality and sector. They also reveal that women's and SIEs' proactive career histories have not been sustained in the Kuwaiti workplace. These demographic differences in protean behavior suggest that the potential benefits of this behavior are limited to members of particular groups, and any intervention strategies to support career development may, therefore, benefit a large portion of the workforce that is impacted by the inequalities. The originality and value of this study stems from addressing four literature gaps. Specifically, it examines the understudied protean behavior as most studies have focused on attitudes. It centers on demographic differences in protean career behavior, utilizes native and SIE samples working in high inequality non-Western context.

Keywords: Age, Arab, Kuwait, economic sector, protean career behavior, self-initiated expatriates, gender

1. Introduction

Organizational careers have been traditionally conceptualized as linear trajectories where individuals advance hierarchically within a single organization over the course of their career. However, a linear career trajectory has become less common because of less stable organizational environments and employment opportunities, even for the most educated candidates, and because of the increased use of transactional rather than relational psychological contracts. (Baruch, 2014). As a result, there has been a shift from corporate careers – where the corporation is the primary career driver – to proactive or “new” careers, where people manage their own careers or expect their organizations to meet them midway in managing their careers (Joo and Lim, 2009). In this respect, Seibert, Kraimer and Crant, (2001) and Gubler, Arnold and Coobs (2013, 2014) have indicated that proactive individuals approach their jobs and careers differently than less proactive ones. Proactive individuals identify opportunities and craft better work environments for themselves to achieve career targets. Less proactive people react to their environments; they tend to adapt to rather than create their environments. Proactive career behavior is a function of individual orientation and environment. That is, even when people hold a proactive orientation, certain organizational/contextual boundaries will still exist with which they must comply (e.g. Lips Wiersma & Hall 2007). For example, in high context cultures where agency is discouraged, proactive behavior becomes challenging. Similarly, when there are demographic inequalities in career opportunities, disadvantaged groups may exhibit less career proactivity than privileged groups (Kostal & Wiernik, 2017).

A new paradigm has emerged, using protean and boundaryless career concepts to study the new career orientation in which career self-management (CSM) is pivotal (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe & Hall 2006; Hall 1996; King 2001; Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010). Individuals following a protean career are posited to take personal responsibility for their career progression and strive towards self-fulfillment. They deploy career tactics such as seeking mentors and sponsors, and they engage in career planning, self-promotion and self-improvement. Similarly, individuals following a boundaryless career are assumed to look beyond as well as within their current employment for career opportunities. They are also willing to cross not only organizational, but also geographical, occupational and other physical and psychological boundaries (Brisco, Hall & DeMuth, 2006). Proactive career research has been increasing since the mid-nineties; however, it has focused on protean and boundaryless attitudes, preferences and perceptions, and largely ignored actual behavior despite the fact that attitudes do not automatically translate into behavior. Also, Gubler et al. (2014), Feldman and Ng (2007) and Kostal and Wiernik (2017) suggested a reconceptualization of the protean career to include psychological boundaryless (e.g., networking outside the firm, and keeping one's finger on the market pulse), which was an original element of the boundaryless construct. They argued that individuals often seek out external validation from the market, not so they can move, but rather so that they can stay with a better negotiated deal. Thus, Gubler et al. (2014) and Kostal and Wiernik (2017) called for more research on proactive career behavior and for incorporating psychological boundaryless as part of a protean career construct. Our study intends to do exactly that by utilizing the Carter and Silva' (2011) scale, one of the few scales that measures protean behavior, and which includes psychological mobility as part of the protean construct. Our focus in this study is on the demographic differences in protean career behavior in a high demographic inequality country. Thus, while psychological boundaryless behavior will be explored, physical boundaryless behavior is not included. In this paper, career proactive behavior, proactivity and CSM are used interchangeably.

1.1 Demographic Differences in CSM

CSM models have incorporated demographic characteristics as antecedents to proactive career attitudes and behaviors (Parker et al., 2010), however empirical research on these relations is limited (Hyde, 2014; Kostal & Wiernik, 2017). Despite their relevance to organizational research and practice, demographics CSM relations have rarely been systematically studied in the West and, to our knowledge, studies in the Arab region are nonexistent. This omission is surprising given that research on the relations between demographic characteristics and other psychological variables has been part of the foundation of psychological sciences for more than a century. Kostal and Wiernik (2017) attributed the inadequate integration of demographic characteristics in CSM literature to researchers' secondary interests in the effects of demographics on CSM. However, interest in studying the effects of demographic differences on CSM has increased recently because of continuing worldwide shifts in workforce structures, due to factors such as increased ratios of older, female and expatriate workers and a better educated/trained workforce. Thus, broadening our understanding of the variations in CSM orientations and their implications for different demographic groups is key to ensuring fair and equitable management of all employees (e.g., Foldes Duehr & Ones, 2008; Ones & Anderson, 2002). Also, it is key to increasing social justice and addressing broad social changes (Kostal & Wiernik, 2017).

The metanalysis study of Kostal and Wiernik, (2017) revealed small effects of demographics on CSM in Western countries, which was attributed to smaller demographic inequalities in those countries. Since greater differences in self-directed behaviors is likely to be found in high inequality countries, they called for research to continue to explore CSM in diverse economic and cultural contexts. In response, this study intends to assess the impact of demographic differences on CSM of highly educated millennial employees working in Kuwait. Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which include Kuwait, are a good place to pursue such research as they have high demographic inequalities in career opportunities. This is due to the fact that their labor markets (LMs) are segmented by gender, nationality, sector and education (Hertog, 2012; International Monetary Fund [IMF] 2014). Their traditional culture, which endorses high masculinity and in-group collectivism and discourages agency, promotes this segmentation (Hofstede, 2001). Another key feature of relevance to career studies is that their LMs include a large expatriate workforce. For example, expatriates represents one third of the highly educated workforce in Kuwait and 82% of the total workforce. It would, therefore, be interesting to learn whether the findings of a study of such demographically unequal and diverse workforce will support the postulation that demographic differences in opportunities lead to greater variance in CSM behavior. This, in turn, has implications for career development, wellbeing and social equity (e.g., Briscoe et al., 2006; Kostal & Wiernik, 2017; Parker et al., 2010; SCCT; Segers et al, 2008).

1.2 The Present Study

Demographic characteristics are theoretically linked to proactive behavior (Briscoe et al, 2006; Parker et al.,

2010; SCCT), but their impact on proactive career attitudes and behavior are seldom empirically investigated (Kostal & Wiernik, 2017). CSM research utilizing non-Western samples (Baruch, 2014; Gubler et al., 2014) and expatriates is also scarce (Al Ariss, 2010). Even less attention is given to the career experiences of those who self-initiated their expatriation (SIEs) in general, and in particular to SIEs from developing countries who expatriate to developing countries (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010). To our knowledge, this study presents the first attempt to assess the unique effects of demographic characteristics on the deployment of career advancement strategies by employees in the Arab region. It utilizes a sample of 908 highly educated millennial employees of Arab and South Asian origin working in Kuwait's LM, which is segmented by gender, sector, nationality and education as indicated earlier (Hertog, 2012). Four demographic characteristics are studied, namely: gender, sector (private and public), age (23-49 years) and nationality (Kuwaiti and SIE). It is important to note that Kuwaitis lead local careers and all SIEs in Kuwait lead international careers (Hertog, 2012). The study controls for the effect of the limited education range as the participants are Bachelor's and Graduate degree holders.

Specifically, we address two sets of preliminary questions on the relations between CSM and demographic differences. First, given the Kuwaiti ascriptive, low agency, high masculinity and power distant societal values (Hofstede, 2001), does the deployment of career advancement strategies vary by gender, nationality, ages and sector? Second, given the small demographic difference in proactive career behaviors in Western countries, do individuals from Eastern countries exhibit similar behaviors to those in the West? That is, do the findings echo those of Western-based research? In view of the scarcity of research tackling these issues, the answers to these questions will contribute to the literature on CSM, management of workforce diversity and organizational and social justices, and they will provide a better understanding of how the protean career construct applies cross culturally.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Below, we consider how the four demographic characteristics examined in the study may relate to protean career behavior.

2.1 Sectorial Effect on Protean Career Behavior

Briscoe and Hall (2006), Segers et al. (2008) and Sullivan and Arthur (2006) indicated that career orientations and proactive career attitudes are not homogeneously distributed across different industries. We will, therefore, explore to what extent the different career systems of the Kuwaiti public and private sectors influence employees' protean career behaviors. Universally, these two sectors have different environmental dynamics, work routines, HRM practices and career systems. However, there are even more stark differences between these two sectors in Kuwait and the rest of the GCC countries. These differences are related to the GCC states' development plans after the discovery of oil. Since then the public sector has led economic development, and the private sector has had a secondary role. Because of their small native populations, the economies of the GCC countries have been heavily reliant on expatriates, often cheap Asian labor. Two types of contracts are being used: social contracts binding citizens to the government and transactional short-term visa contracts for expatriate labor.

One of the distinctive features of Kuwaiti public organizations is that they are large bureaucracies which are highly hierarchical, centralized, formalized, rigid and loyalty based. They are built on the rentier (welfare) economic model (Beblawi, 1987), which distributes wealth to the citizens and guarantees jobs for all Kuwaiti job seekers. Furthermore, the government has a policy of affirmative action programs, with enforced quota systems and other workforce restructuring measures aiming to limit reliance on SIEs and enhance natives' employability and career advancement. Thus, the public sector's bureaucracies have become employers of last resort for Kuwaitis. Also, they have dual HRM and career systems - one for Kuwaitis and another for foreign labor. For Kuwaitis, the system guarantees cradle-to-grave welfare benefits, generous pay and pensions, low accountability, short working days, fast track careers and other perks (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014). Consequently, Kuwaiti citizenship has become an asset which has increased Kuwaitis' sense of entitlement and has resulted in a disconnect between performance and rewards. Unsurprisingly, Kuwaitis gravitate towards the public sector which has become the largest and ultimate employer, but also inefficient and bloated with an underemployed Kuwaiti workforce. The increasing numbers of young educated Kuwaiti job seekers and the current bloating of public organizations is frustrating young civil servants' career advancement and dreams (Abdalla 2006; Abdalla & Al Homoud, 2012).

Drawing from the Kuwaiti HRM literature (cf., Ali & Al Kazmi, 2006) and typology of career systems of Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988), we deduce that the career systems in the Kuwaiti public sector resemble a "Club career system" which values loyalty, seniority and job tenure (Sonnenfeld & Peiperl, 1988). Career systems, like the one enjoyed by Kuwaiti civil servants, promote embeddedness and increase the perceived costs of quitting.

Hence, it may dampen their protean career orientations (Cooper Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Feldman & Ng, 2007). In this respect, King (2001) stated that individuals in “Club career systems” tend to be more embedded in and loyal to their organizations and stress similarity with their seniors through impression management. In contrast, the private sector has a few oligopolies owned by powerful families, however, most organizations are small, lean and organic. On the other hand, private businesses tend to rely on government contracts, and are also heavily reliant on state-subsidized utilities, cheap foreign labor and greatly benefit from token taxation. As their survival is dependent on government contracts, the government leverages the employment of citizens in this sector by linking allocation of contracts to compliance with employment quotas for Kuwaitis. In order to hasten the achievement of targets for the employment of Kuwaitis in the private sector, the government supplements Kuwaiti salaries, among other measures. However, apart from the above-mentioned governmental interventions, there are minimal governmental measures regulating the behavior of private organizations and the protection of their employees. Given the absence of labor unions, this sector has considerable freedom regarding its HRM practices (Abdalla, 2006).

Private firms are often in survival mode and tend to use retrenchment business strategies. Thus, they have low loyalty to their employees and employability depends on contributions to the bottom line (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014). Transactional contracts and external recruiting policies are the norm. Apart from merit, recruitment is based on employment costs for expatriates and meeting government quota targets for Kuwaitis (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2014). The career systems of private organizations in Kuwait, therefore, resemble Sonnenfeld & Peiperl’s (1988) “Fortress career system”. Since these systems are based on low job security and short-term transactional employment contracts, employees tend to adopt higher protean and boundaryless career behaviors. In contrast, the values of stability and loyalty of the public sector may dampen proactive behavior of civil servants (e.g., Briscoe and Finkelstein, 2009; King, 2001; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: Private sector employees exhibit more protean behaviors than civil servants.

2.3 Effect of Nationality (SIEs versus Kuwaitis) on Protean Behavior

Compared to SIEs, nationals tend to have higher wages for similar grades, enter employment at higher levels, and move up the ladder faster. Furthermore, some positions are reserved for nationals and expatriates are expected to defer to them in career opportunities. Thus, there are significant differences in wage and non-wage benefits, career ladders and trajectories, organizational support and psychological contracts between nationals and SIEs employed in the same sector, even for comparable job content and skills. As noted earlier, the State supplements the salaries and pensions of Kuwaiti private sector employees. It also protects their employment through affirmative action, Kuwaitization programs and government contracts that are conditional on meeting specific employment targets. In contrast, SIEs work on merit-based, short-term transactional visa contracts. Their interorganizational mobility is highly restricted, and their employment status is vulnerable since their status as expatriates is self-initiated and not supported by any organization. Most Kuwaitis, therefore, have secure, well paid jobs and traditional career trajectories within large State bureaucracies, while SIEs have non-linear careers and relatively precarious employment in both sectors. The hiring and firing of foreign labor is loosely regulated.

It is important to note that SIEs are a unique group who are seldom studied. Most of the literature on expatriates focuses on assigned expatriate employees (as in the case of MNC), overseas experience seekers (who are motivated by curiosity and are self-supporting), and immigrants (who seek permanent residencies). Since the SIE concept was first developed, researchers have stressed the personal agency and the dynamic self-directed career paths leading to expatriation (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle & Barry, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). A distinctive feature of self-initiated expatriation is freedom of choice, (Cao et al, 2012; Inkson, et al., 1997) as SIEs essentially choose where to expatriate, and the length of their “finite/time limited” expatriation after which they repatriate back home or move to another country. For this reason, the SIE concept has been related theoretically to protean and boundaryless career orientations (Briscoe et al., 2006; Cao et al, 2012; Crowley Henry, 2007; Doherty, Dickman, & Mills, 2011). Hence, while SIEs have career proactive mindsets the work setting is dampening their proactivity. This is because factors such as HRM policies, organizational culture, LM and residency regulations, “fortress career systems” and the self-supporting nature of their expatriation increase their vulnerability and encourage their deference to Kuwaitis in career opportunities. Conversely, HRM systems and governmental policies increase Kuwaitis’ sense of entitlement/privilege and decrease their perceived cost of failure. Hence, they are not afraid to proactively ask for better career opportunities despite the low agency culture of the Middle East. In other words, the supportive environment makes it easier for Kuwaitis to be proactive because they have larger margins for error than SIEs (Abdalla & Al Homoud, 2012). Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Kuwaitis exhibit more proactive behavior than SIEs.

2.4 Effect of Gender on Protean Behavior

Many scholars (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Carter & Silva, 2011; Segers et al, 2008) have reported negligible gender differences in career self-directedness, although gender disparities in career values, interests and trajectories have been found. However, gender disparities in other relevant characteristics, such as, leadership and enterprising career interests have decreased overtime (Schmitt et al., 2008; Schulz and Su, 2016). Kostal and Wiernik's (2017) meta-analysis study confirmed the gender similarities in protean and boundaryless career orientations, and cautioned that the negligible gender gaps could be related to the participants' high gender equality countries. Thus, they called for research in high gender inequality countries to increase the understanding of the relation between gender and proactive behavior. Similarly, Weir and Crowley Henry (2013) called for research on Arab women's protean behavior. One of the few comparative studies on high and low gender inequality countries is Pringle and Mallon's (2003), which indicated that men had stronger proactive career orientations than women in high gender inequality countries than in low inequality ones. They argued that, when women were denied opportunities to pursue their own interests, they were less able to engage in protean and boundaryless career behaviors and were less likely to adopt career orientations that prioritized the pursuit of their self-interests. Thus, in highly patriarchal Kuwaiti organizations it is more likely that women's career proactivity will be discouraged despite their high level of education. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: Men exhibit more career proactive behavior than women.

2.5 Effect of Age on Protean Behavior

Numerous social and psychological changes occur throughout the lifespan that impact career behavior. Early career individuals tend to take more risk and deploy more proactive career strategies, particularly in the areas of self-promotion, boundarylessness and training and development. Their proactivity is driven by their interest in adaptability, personal growth and extrinsic rewards linked to instrumental values (Smola & Sutton, 2002). In contrast, older employees tend to have more social commitments, are more embedded in their organizations and are, therefore, less proactive because they are more interested in stability (Morris & Venkatesh, 2000) and terminal values (Sullivan, Martin, Carden & Mainiero, 2003). Generally, money, promotion and status tend to lose their worth with age while job security gains importance. The decline in proactive behavior with age and career progression is also attributed to changes in the dynamics of cost benefit trade offs, possible learning difficulties, lower energy levels, habituation and reduced employment opportunities in the late stages of the career maintenance phase. However, nowadays, increase in age is not such a strong dampener of proactivity as it was previously. Current employment challenges have increased the number of older employees facing a greater number of transitions, encountering frequent employer and job changes and deferred retirements. Hence, CSM and career guidance are needed at a greater number of points during the course of an adult career (King, 2001). Hence, the negative relationship between age and CSM might be weaker than in the past. In this study, we expect the effects of age differences in CSM to be further weakened by the limited age range of the sample. Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Age has negative relation with proactive career behavior.

3. Method

3.1 Participants and Procedure

The participants were 908 highly educated employees working in various medium to large public and private Kuwaiti organizations. The questionnaires were administered by the research team through their contacts in different organizations. The respondents' voluntary participation was requested by the team, no formal involvement of the management of the organizations was solicited and no payments were made to any of the participants. About 1250 questionnaires were administered to employees in different private and public organizations and 908 completed questionnaires received. The goal was to have a sample that: (1) fairly equally represented men, women, public, private, native and SIEs. (2) All respondents should be employed, hold Bachelor's or graduate degrees, range in age between 23 to 49 years, and be of Arab or South Asian origin. The actual distribution of the sample by demographics was not equal but acceptable. Description of the participants is presented in Table 1.

3.2 Instrument

The degree of utilization of career advancement strategies was measured by an adapted version of a 19-item scale developed by Carter and Silva (2011) which assesses employees' career advancement initiatives about discerning the political landscape, seeking better opportunities, capabilities and visibility, networking and

getting/providing support. The respondents were asked to think of their overall career and determine the extent to which they actively used each of the 19 tactics in the list. A 5-point scale (To a great extent; Not at all) was used. The scale was translated into Arabic using a translation back translation procedure (Brislin, 1970). A bilingual native Arab translated the English items into Arabic and a second bilingual native translated this version into English. Finally, the two English versions were compared to verify that the meaning of each item was retained, and any necessary corrections were made. A wide range of demographic characteristics were measured.

Table 1. Description of the sample (N = 908)

Demographic characteristics	%
Sector	
Public	54.7
Private	55.3
Gender	
Male	42
Female	58
Age	
23-29 year	30
30-39 year	38
40-49 year	32
Nationality	
Kuwait	67.6
SIEs	32.4
SIEs	
Arabs (% Egyptian)	47 (56%)
South Asians (% Indians)	53 (75%)
Education	
Bachelor's	67
Master's and Ph. D	21
Advanced professional degree	12
Marital status	
Married	71
Single	29

Note. SIEs = self-initiated expatriates. Percentages in brackets show the dominant nationality in the Arabs and South Asian SIEs cohorts.

4. Analysis and Results

3.1 Factor Analysis: Testing the Dimensionality of the Scale

The total scale has Cronbach Alpha reliability score ($\alpha = 0.90$). Carter and Silva's (2011) scale was originally used on a sample of 3,345 high potential young employees of Fortune Global 500 companies, and the Factor analysis produced 9-dimensions. To determine whether we could replicate their findings, we used similar Factor analysis procedure and specified nine items to be extracted. This is permitted when there is a prior reason to assume that the scale's items will translate neatly into factors and that the researchers are not open to new interpretations based on their empirical data (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). The factor analysis applied varimax rotation. To achieve practical (rather than just statistical) significance, no cross-loadings larger than 0.50 and only variables with communalities larger than 0.50 were accepted. A 9-factor solution explained 76.37 percent of the variance of the 19 items, which is deemed good in social sciences (Hair et al., 2006). The results are largely similar to Carter and Silva's (2011) but they are not identical.

The factors represent nine strategies labelled following Carter & Silva (2011) and the general labels used in the literature. As found by Carter and Silva (2011), four factors had more than two items and the rest consisted of one item. For each factor, the factor label, number of items and Cronbach Alpha reliability scores, where relevant, and sample items are as follows: 'Access to power', (4 items; $\alpha = .830$), "I get myself introduced to people in my organization who can influence my career"; 'Psychological boundaryless' (5 items, $\alpha = .814$), "I stay in touch with people who know about job market opportunities"; 'Take credit' (2 items, $\alpha = .755$), "I make sure I get credit for the work I do"; 'Seek promotion and feedback' (2 items, $\alpha = .681$), "When I think I deserve it, I ask to be

considered for promotion”; ‘Task variety’, “I ask for a variety of work assignments to increase my knowledge and skills”; ‘Learn firm dynamics’, “I take time to learn how things really work inside the firm”; ‘Blur work life boundaries’, “I make sure my supervisor knows I am willing to work long hours and/or weekends”; ‘Seek advice’, “I ask for career advice from co-workers, family and friends about how to improve my future work prospects”; ‘Plan career’, “I have developed a plan for the next several years of my career”. We note that in Carter and Sliva’s (2011) study, four items represented ‘Make achievement visible’ strategy, while in this study the four items loaded on two separate factors which we labelled ‘Take credit’ and ‘Promotion and Feedback’. Two strategies measuring ‘scanning of internal and external employment opportunity’ loaded onto one factor which we labelled ‘Psychological boundaryless’.

4.1 Cluster Analysis: Exploring the Career Proactivity Orientations

We explored whether meaningful clusters of people with different styles of career advancement strategies could be identified. We used two-step cluster analysis on the nine strategies, with the assumption that they might coalesce into distinct strategy orientations. Indeed, the analysis produced two distinct clusters representing Hedger and Coaster strategy orientations. Each represents homogeneous strategies used by specific groups of participants who have distinct strategy archetype. Participants with Hedger and Coaster orientations represent 61.2% and 32.8% of the sample, respectively. Hedgers put higher emphasis on all tactics. That is, they have a stronger preference for working beyond organizational boundaries as well as inside it. Coasters most distinctive characteristic is that they have significantly lower scores than the Hedgers on all strategies. The results confirm the presence of clear cut clusters and the consistency of the data. Table 2 shows the cluster centers of these nine strategies, indicating the participants’ preferences for and use of strategic behavior pertaining to a particular factor. The scores of the two groups are significant at $P < .001$.

4.2 Regression Analyses

Correlation coefficients between the demographic characteristics, the nine career advancement strategies and two strategy orientations are presented in Table 3. Linear and Binary logistic regression analyses were used to assess the influence of the four demographical characteristics on the deployment of the nine strategies and two strategy orientations (Tables 4 and 5). Table 6 presents profiles of the participants in the two clusters (Hedger and Coaster).

Table 2. Cluster analysis - Final cluster centers of the nine strategies for the strategy orientations

	Strategy orientation *	
	Hedger	Coaster
Take credit	4.32	3.28
Learn firm’s dynamics	4.14	3.28
Seek task Variety	4.12	3.23
Seek access to power	3.96	2.99
Pursue Promotion and feedback	4.00	2.90
Seek advice	3.96	2.90
Psychological boundaryless	3.69	2.65
Career planning	3.73	2.49
Blur work life boundaries	3.73	2.15
Participants: N / %	536 / 61.2%	372 / 38.8%

Note. * 10 iterations for cluster analysis. $P < .001$.

Table 3. Means, SD and Pearson correlation coefficients for the demographics, strategies and strategy orientations (N = 908)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender			-													
2. Nationality			-.094**													
3. Sector			-.153**	.212**												
4. Age			-.145**	.137**	-.098**											
5. Education			-.051	.161**	.065	.095**										
6. Seek access to power	3.56	.92	-.142**	-.043	.118**	.014	-.027									
7. Psychological boundaryless	3.26	.93	-.075*	.026	.133**	-.060	.042	.499**								
8. Take credit	3.89	.98	-.020	-.194**	.003	-.054	-.012	.505**	.380**							
9. Seek promotion and feedback	3.55	1.07	-.089**	-.117**	.060	-.056	-.026	.367**	.367**	.551**						
10. Seek task variety	3.75	1.05	-.076*	.075*	.121**	.033	.014	.479**	.302**	.227**	.200**					
11. Career planning	3.23	1.22	-.119**	.053	.111**	.037	.052	.362**	.454**	.221**	.274**	.240**				
12. Seek advice	3.53	1.13	-.016	-.034	.031	-.131**	-.029	.292**	.457**	.255**	.223**	.226**	.377**			
13. Learn firm's dynamics	3.79	.98	-.065	-.073*	.044	-.001	-.016	.465**	.378**	.399**	.234**	.329**	.274**	.327**		
14. Blur Work-life boundaries	3.08	1.37	-.065*	.092**	.103**	.000	.051	.311**	.352**	.291**	.348**	.291**	.268**	.235**	.231**	
15. Hedger/Coaster			-.055	-.057	.124**	-.043	.032	.026	.624**	.663**	.581**	.517**	.358**	.415**	.330**	.396**

Note. Gender: 1 = males, 2 = Females; Nationality: 1 = Kuwaiti, 2 = SIE; Sector: 1 = Public sector, 2 = Private sector. Strategy orientations: 1 = Hedger orientation, 2 = Coaster orientation. *** P < .001, ** P < .01, *P < .05

5. Findings

The correlation coefficient results (Table 3) show that the direction of the relationship between proactive behaviors and demographic difference is similar to and stronger than previous Western-based findings (e.g., Kostal & Wiernik, 2017). The regression results (Tables 4 and 5) support Hypotheses 1 to 4, suggesting that gender, nationality, sector and age influence the frequency of use of the career advancement strategies. However, the influence of age is relatively limited in terms of the range of strategies it influences, and it has an insignificant effect on the strategy orientation. Table 6 presents the distribution of demographics per strategy orientations. Specifically, men, Kuwaitis, private sector and younger employees tend to be more proactive than women, SIEs, civil servants and older employees. Sector, nationality and, to a lesser degree, gender have the largest contributions to the variance in the deployment of more than half the strategies (Table 4) and they also differentiate between the Hedger and Coaster career advancement strategy orientations (Table 5). Specifically, Table 5 indicate that the probability of being a Coaster increases by about 35% if the participant is a female than a male, it doubles in case of SIEs than Kuwaitis, and it is reduced by 42% if the participant works in the private sector than in the public sector. Education (Bachelor's versus graduate degree holders) is a control variable and has insignificant effects on the dependent variables. Table 6 results confirmed the regression results. An overview of the results of the individual strategies shows that the effects of demographic differences on protean career behaviors are low to moderate, with the strategies of 'Seek promotion and feedback', 'Access to power' and 'Psychological boundaryless' showing the largest differences across the four demographics, namely gender, nationality, sector and age. In contrast, 'Take credit' strategy has shown the least difference across the demographics except for nationality. As for nationality, Kuwaitis use 'Take credit' strategy significantly more than SIEs. The specific effects of the demographics on protean behaviors and orientation will be presented in detail in the discussion section.

Table 4. Linear regression of demographic characteristics on career advancement strategies

Dependent variables	Antecedents variables (β values)					Constant	R	R^2
	Gender	Nationality	Sector	Age	Education			
Take credit	-.049	-.214***	.046	-.056	.035	4.564***	.223	.050
Learn firm's dynamics	.066	-.090**	.050	-.002	-.044	4.098***	.112	.013
Seek task variety	-.052	.037	.110***	.018	.026	3.398***	.148	.022
Seek access to power	-.143***	-.086**	.121***	.002	-.044	3.929***	.200	.041
Seek promotion and feedback	-.105***	-.147***	.076*	-.065	-.017	4.227	.193	.037
Seek advice	-.031	-.024	.020	-.124***	-.019	3.180***	.133	.018
Psychological boundaryless	-.067*	-.007	.119***	-.074*	.038	3.243***	.170	.028
Planning career	-.099***	.022	.093***	.027	-.026	3.180***	.156	.024
Blur work and life boundaries	-.042	.072*	.076*	-.014	.036	2.666	.137	.019

Note. *** $P < .001$, ** $P < .01$, * $P < .05$.

Table 5. Logistic regression (Binary) of demographics on strategy orientation

	B	S.E.	Wald	P	Exp(B)
Gender	.304	.146	4.320	.038	1.355
Nationality	.711	.158	20.300	.000	2.037
Sector	-.544	.149	13.350	.000	.580
Age	.082	.090	.830	.362	1.085
Education	-.107	.133	.642	.423	.899
Constant	-1.099	.451	5.949	.015	.333

Note. Hedger orientation = 1, Coaster orientation = 2.

Table 6. Distribution of demographic by strategy orientation (%)

Participants (N)	Demographic	Hedger	Coaster
384	Men	64.8	35.2
524	Women	58.6	41.4
614	Kuwaiti	63.0	35.0
294	SIEs	53.4	46.6
497	Public sector	56.7	43.3
411	Private sector	66.7	33.3
338	Age 23-29	64.2	35.8
315	Age 30-39	59.4	40.6
255	Age 40-49	59.6	40.4
600	Bachelor's degree	61.5	38.5
268	Graduate degree	58.2	41.8

Note. Total = 908 participants.

6. Discussion

In response to calls for protean career research in high demographic inequality countries, this study sought to determine what types of strategy young educated employees use to advance their careers in the Kuwaiti segmented LM and traditional environment. Explicitly, the study assesses the unique effects of the participants' gender, nationality, age and sector on their utilization of a wide variety of career advancement strategies. We addressed the question, what do individuals with different demographical characteristics do to enhance their strategic competitive positions and sway supervisors' decisions in their favor? Utilizing a sample of 908 Kuwaitis, other Arabs, and South Asian employees working in Kuwait, the findings suggest that the best way to advance is not a one-size-fits-all. The career competitive landscape is unlevelled and, therefore, members of different demographic groups exhibit different types of protean career behaviors. Specifically, Kuwaitis, men, private sector and younger employees use protean career strategies significantly more than their counterparts.

The effect of age on CSM is similar to Western findings. However, gender, nationality and sector gaps in CSM are much more pronounced in Kuwait than in the West where demographic equality in opportunity is higher (Kostal & Wiernick, 2017). These results suggest daunting disparities in CSM with implications for career opportunities. The disparities are deeply rooted in the socio-political context and the Kuwaiti LM segmentation by gender, nationality and sector (Abdalla, 2006; Hertog, 2012). Below, we will discuss the findings pertaining to the effects of gender, nationality, sector and age on individual protean behaviors and strategy orientations.

6.1 The Unique Influence of Sector on Proactive Behavior

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the findings indicate that private sector employees are more proactive in managing their careers and have significantly stronger Hedger career orientations than civil servants (Tables 4 to 6). Specifically, there are sectorial differences in the intensity of deployment of six career advancement strategies pertaining to seeking 'Job variety', 'Access to power' and 'Promotion and feedback', as well as 'Blurring work life boundaries', and engaging in 'Psychological boundaryless' and 'career planning'. These findings support previous results (e.g., Briscoe & Hall 2006; Segers et al, 2008; Sullivan & Arthur 2006) which indicated that dynamic sectors/industries and organic organizational designs encourage proactive behavior, while bureaucratic, rigid and formalized establishments, such as governmental organizations, espouse linear/traditional careers and hence dampen proactivity. Other structural factors such as the smaller sizes of the Kuwaiti private organizations and the different managerial and career systems of the two sectors may have influenced the sectorial gap in protean behavior. For example, the career structures of public organizations resemble Sonnenfeld and Peiperl's (1988) "Club system" and it is based on a managerial style referred to by Ali and Al Kazemi (2006) as a Sheikhoocracy, i.e. a tribalistic system which is a mixture of bureaucracy, autocracy and paternalistic managerial styles and which is centralized and formalized, yet people rather than task oriented. Loyalty, in-group collectivism and generous employment packages for citizens are at the core of this system, and merit is secondary. Thus, because Kuwaitis' employment packages are better in public than private organizations, they are often highly satisfied with job security and materialistic rewards but not as satisfied with job content (Abdalla & Al Homoud, 2012; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014). This is in line with Parker's et al. (2010) argument that contentment discourages career proactive behavior. The findings can also be explained by Schneider's attraction-selection-attrition theory (1987), in that people who prefer non-linear careers and have Hedger career orientation may have sought employment in the private sector, while those who favor traditional careers and have Coaster career orientation flocked towards the public sector. Thus, there is a possibility that personality differences may have contributed to the difference in the CSM orientations of civil servants versus private sector employees. In this respect, Schneider (1987) stated that "the people make the place".

6.2 The Unique Influence of Nationality on Proactive Behavior

The findings support Hypothesis 2 and indicate that Kuwaitis pursue more protean strategies and have a stronger Hedger career orientation than SIEs (Tables 4 to 6). Specifically, they reveal that SIEs are less proactive than Kuwaitis in utilizing the strategies of 'Taking credit', 'Learning firm's dynamics', and seeking 'Promotion and feedback' and 'Access to power'. Also, Kuwaitis are more likely to have Hedger orientation than SIEs. Interestingly, SIEs' have a greater tendency to use "Blurring work life boundaries" more than Kuwaitis, which may relate to their merit-based employment. There are insignificant differences between SIEs and Kuwaitis regarding the rest of the strategies.

By exhibiting less proactive behavior than Kuwaitis in four strategies and espousing a Coaster orientation in Kuwait, SIEs seem to have reversed their past highly proactive behavior which they displayed when they initiated their self-initiated and self-supported expatriation. Generally, SIEs are considered an embodiment of a boundaryless and protean career mindset because they self-initiated and sustained, without organizational help, their expatriation to a foreign country. Also, because they follow their own career agenda and cross geographical, cultural, familial, organizational and/or professional boundaries (Hall 1996). Interestingly, SIEs' current behavior is not only inconsistent with their proactive history, but it also inconsistent with the theoretical premise that individuals with short term/transactional employment contracts or "fortress career systems" (Sonnenfeld & Peiperl's, 1988) tend to be more proactive. In support, King (2001) and Maguire (2002) argue that in organizations which pursue purely transactional relationships with their employees, employees tended to pursue more self-interest careers, develop stronger protean and boundaryless orientations, and choose job moves tactically to maximize opportunities for employment elsewhere. We attribute the divergence of SIEs present behaviors from their past behaviors and previous research findings to their precarious employment situations and perception that proactive behavior is risky. SIEs encounter many career challenges in the GCC region accruing from LM and residency regulations, the pressures of the job nationalization policies and HRM systems which restrict SIEs interorganizational mobility and career advancement and which encourage their deference to

Kuwaitis in career opportunities. In addition to these restrictions, SIEs' are basically contractors on short term visa employment in a low agency country, hence we surmise that these factors discourage proactive behavior. When the abovementioned factors are combined with SIEs' vulnerability to economic downturns and layoffs, the situation may be especially difficult for these individuals to marshal the psychological resources needed to take the risks of behaving proactively in this low agency culture (Wanberg, 2012).

In contrast, Kuwaitis have empowering environments, which are reinforced by measures that guarantee their prosperity and career advancement, such as governmental affirmative action programs and a rentier (welfare) economy that embodies a break in the work reward causation and creates a rentier class where citizenship is a financial and employment security asset (Beblawi, 1987). Kuwaitis, therefore, have social contract with the government, relational psychological contracts with their employers and career systems based, among other things, on ascription culture, which values citizenship, loyalty and social status more than merit. Such supportive career contexts tend to lower boundaryless and protean behaviors (King, 2001), yet our findings show that Kuwaitis' proactive behaviors are relatively high. In fact, Kuwaitis are significantly more proactive than SIEs' who have transactional contracts. Hence, Kuwaitis' behavior is inconsistent with the theoretical postulations that traditional careers and relational contracts lower proactive behaviors, particularly when the individuals are contented (Parker et al., 2010). We surmise that the Kuwaitis' strong sense of entitlement/privilege is behind their Hedger orientation.

Also, we surmise that the unlevelled career landscape and the peculiar Kuwaiti LM and dual HRM practices are behind the divergence of Kuwaitis' and SIEs' proactive behaviors from the Western general norm. This confirms Kostal and Wiernick's (2017) predictions and Pringle and Mallon's (2003) findings. The divergence is also attributed to the Kuwaitis' sense of entitlement/privilege for better economic status and an enabling culture that make them unafraid to ask. In contrast, SIEs' precarious employment settings may make it unsafe to proactively manage their careers. For example, the inconspicuous/discrete boundaryless behavior exhibited by the SIEs in this study may be related to the LM and residency laws, which limit expatriates' interorganizational mobility. It is important to note at this juncture that very little research has been done on the impact of race, ethnicity and expatriation on protean career (Kostal & Wiernick's, 2017), and even less research has focused on the relation between self-initiated expatriation and protean career attitudes/orientations (Cao et al., 2012).

6.3 The Unique Effect of Gender on Proactive Behavior

The results indicate that women are less career proactive than men, and they are more likely to have Coaster orientation. Men tend to be Hedgers and they use the following five strategies more than women: 'Learn firm's dynamics', seek 'Promotion and feedback' and 'Access to power', and engage in 'psychological boundaryless' and 'career planning' (Tables 4 to 6). No gender differences were detected in the other four strategies. Thus, the results generally support Hypothesis 3. It is interesting to note that the current low career behavior exhibited by women in the workplace is a stark transformation from their school conduct (Abdalla, 2015a & b). Middle-eastern women, particularly Kuwaiti women, do many things right in terms of hard work, merit and proactive behavior during their education stage, which resulted in women scoring significantly better than men in average years of education and learning grades (Abdalla, 2015a & b). However, in the workplace their career proactive behaviors seem to drop to levels lower than men. That is, the proactive behavior behind the gender gap in education favoring women is not replicated in their proactive behavior at work. In fact, the gender gaps are reversed, favoring men not only in in proactive career behavior but also in economic status and workforce participation rates (Abdalla, 2015b). In this respect, WEF (2018) demonstrated this paradox within the GCC women who tend to be well educated by international standards yet lag behind in economic participation and opportunity. For example, Kuwaiti females represent over 68% of both the university educated native workforce and tertiary education enrolments, but occupy only 20% of the lower and middle level managerial positions and less than 5% of the top managerial posts (CSB, 2017). The large female education-employment gaps are attributed to strong sociopolitical factors such as patriarchal social values, religious political centers, glass-ceiling, tokenism, male clubbism, work/life conflict and LM segmentation (Abdalla, 2006, 2015a; Karam & Afioni, 2013). We surmise that some of these barriers might have dampened women's proactive career behaviors and, consequently, they are less proactive than Western women (Carter & Silva, 2011; Segers et al, 2008). Arab women find it more difficult than men to use the strategies of 'Access to power' or "Ask for promotion' due to their token presence in leadership/senior positions and the traditions (e.g., modesty of women) which discourage women from appearing competitive, engaging in hard persuasion or initiating relations with male managers (Abdalla, 2015a).

These results are dejecting because they show that highly educated young women are no longer proactively pushing to better their careers in the workplace as they were in school. Thus, future research is needed to explore what other roles these women see themselves playing to enhance their career opportunities besides CSM. In

contrast to the Kuwaiti results, Carter and Silva (2011) found that in high gender equality cultures highly educated women were not only similar to men in career self-directedness but, in some instances, more proactive than men. For example, they were more proactive than men in using the career advancement strategies of asking for 'more task variety', 'formal and on-the-job training', and 'exploring internal organizational dynamics'. However, their results are not supported by Kostal and Wiernik's (2017) meta-analysis which found insignificant gender differences in proactive behavior, except for psychological boundaryless where men were more proactive than women. In sum, the gender and nationality gaps in protean career behaviors and in career opportunities presented above, seem to be entrenched in conundrums of contextual factors and hence the results differ from the research findings in higher gender equality countries. In support, Kostal and Wiernik (2017) argued that in high gender inequality countries there were larger differences between men's and women's approaches to career self-directedness and career mobility, where women, due to lack of opportunities, tend to pursue less proactive careers orientations. The same arguments apply to SIEs versus Kuwaitis.

6.4 The Unique Influence of Age on Protean Behavior

The findings suggest that age has limited impact as it influences only three strategies namely, 'Ask for promotion and feedback', 'Seek advice' and 'Psychological boundaryless' and has an insignificant effect on individuals' strategy orientations. Thus, the results partially support Hypothesis 4. However, as was mentioned earlier the limited effect of age could be attributed to the small age range of the sample which consists of the two youngest generations of the workforce (i.e., millennials and generation Z). These cohorts are in the exploration and establishment phases of their careers when individuals tend to be more proactive (Wiedmer, 2015). The results might also relate to the pragmatic nature of both Generation Z and millennials, as both tend to hold stronger beliefs than older generations that career self-directedness is the prime responsibility of the employee. In this respect, Kanfer and Ackemen (2004) indicated that younger individuals and those in their career exploration phase are, generally, more open to psychological boundaryless behavior and interorganizational moves. Warr (2008) argued that older employees were less mobile because they were more settled and expected less value return, as was mentioned earlier. Also, Generation Z are believed to be more drawn to safety and risk aversiveness than the millennials which might have dampened Generation Z's proactivity and shrunk the influence of the age gap (Wiedmer, 2015).

In contrast, previous findings, which did not include Generation Z and included a wider age range, showed a stronger relationship between age and proactive behavior (e.g., Wiedmer, 2015). For example, the findings of Kostal and Wiernik (2017) pertaining to high equality countries revealed a curvilinear relation between age and protean/boundaryless behaviors. Thus, the results of this study are consistent with previous empirical findings (e.g., Segers et al., 2008; Briscoe et al., 2008) and Life span theories, despite the study's weaker effect of age on CSM for the reasons explained above.

7. Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

In conclusion, this is one of the few studies with an exclusive focus on demographic differences in protean behavior, as most protean career studies have demographics as an ancillary focus (Kostal & Wiernik, 2017). Since previous studies were conducted in high demographic equality countries, this study contributes to the literature by utilizing a sample from a high demographic inequality country (Kuwait). Primary findings are the greater influence of demographic differences in protean career in Kuwait than in the West, asserting the importance of demographic characteristics as antecedents to proactive behavior. These results suggest that while conventional wisdom encourages all employees to be proactive to advance their careers and achieve social justice, the intersections between demographic characteristics and the Kuwaiti context have limited this privilege to members of particular groups. Specifically, men, Kuwaitis, private sector and younger employees are more proactive than women, SIEs, civil servants and older employees. The findings depict a much more disheartening picture than in the West, that the psychological and work-related benefits associated with career proactive behavior are unevenly accessible to demographic groups' members, even among the highly educated. It is important to remember that even small differences in protean behavior can indicate great loss of opportunity for impacted individuals. These unlevelled playing fields may lead to a lack of control over the lives of affected groups, opening them to profound negative psychological and material consequences (Spector et al., 2002). The current situation, when considered at the level of the whole workforce, shows that these vulnerable populations represent thousands of individuals, and is deserving of the attention of policy makers, organizations, researchers and society. Thus, interventions to support protean career behavior will benefit a large number of employees. Since the demographic CSM relations mimic the LM segmentations, which are rooted on systemic inequalities in the region, a straightforward recommendation is to work towards the elimination the segmentations. Ironically, this requires the empowerment of the affected individuals (i.e., women and SIEs) to be more proactive, which

might be more challenging for them to do given the findings of this study and the low agency culture.

Of special importance are the plight of SIEs and women because their career barriers are more pervasive and out of their control compared with civil servants and older participants. Considering the greater convergence between the contextual disparities and the gaps in protean behavior by demographic characteristics, it is our hope that this study promotes increased collaboration between researchers in the fields of HRM, economic policy and social equity to better understand and fairly manage the increasingly diversified workforces around the world. Further investigation of demographic difference in proactive career behavior is needed in high and low demographic equality regions. In depth exploration of the reasons behind the decline in protean behaviors of women and SIEs in the Arab region is also needed. It is also important to replicate this study utilizing less educated subjects, where the impact of demographic differences in proactive behavior may be more blatant.

Acknowledgements

This study was partially funded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science, State of Kuwait.

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