

Career mobility in young professionals

How a protean career personality and attitude shapes international mobility and entrepreneurial intentions

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Received 8 October 2017
Revised 12 December 2017
8 January 2018
Accepted 8 January 2018

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of protean-related traits and attitudes in the development of international mobility (expatriation) and entrepreneurial intentions among early career professionals. Career mobility is of increasing relevance to achieving career success in the era of protean and boundaryless careers, and in the present day highly globalized labor market. International mobility provides opportunities for work in organizations (corporate expatriation) as well as in entrepreneurship (expat entrepreneurship).

Design/methodology/approach – This paper reports two studies examining the role of “protean career personality,” conceptualized as consisting of personal initiative and flexibility on entrepreneurial and expatriation intention, looking at career orientation attitude as the mediating mechanism. In study 1, the impact of personal initiative and flexibility on the two career mobility paths is explored using a sample of 442 German undergraduate students. Study 2 replicates these relationships among a sample of 100 early career professionals who graduated with a diploma in psychology.

Findings – Results indicate that for the sample of undergraduate students, flexibility and career orientation were positively related to expatriation intention. However, the mediation path was non-significant. On the other hand, personal initiative and career orientation were essential for entrepreneurial intentions, with a significant mediation path. For the early career professionals in contrast, only flexibility turned out to be resourceful for both expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions.

Practical implications – Suggestions for supporting early career professionals to develop interest in working abroad or in entrepreneurship are provided. Particularly, the results indicate that protean traits affect mobility intentions differently. To strengthen intentions for expatriation work, attention should be paid enhancing the ability for staying flexible when it comes to career choices. This applies to both undergraduate students and early career professionals. However, a strong career orientation is also essential to the development of expatriation intention among current students. On the other hand, enhancing proactivity could strengthen entrepreneurial intention among undergraduate students.

Originality/value – This study applies protean-related traits and attitudes; and how they work together in the development of mobility intentions among undergraduate students and early career professionals. The study reveals differential roles of these traits and attitudes among these groups, with regard to expatriation and entrepreneurship. This is important for career guidance.

Keywords Entrepreneurial intentions, Expatriation, Career orientation, Protean career, Flexibility, Career mobility, International mobility, Personal initiative

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Flexibility has been emphasized in recent research as an important attribute that fosters career development and success (Arthur, 2014; Hamtiaux *et al.*, 2013; Lent and Brown, 2013). Sticking to one's learned trade is no longer fashionable since career paths have become less systematic (Arnold, 2001; Baruch, 2004). It is conceived that career paths have become nonlinear and discontinuous, and with more forces coming into play in labor market and career development, individuals are now required to take more control of their career development (Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). The labor market today is grossly affected by technological advancement and globalization (Lent and Brown, 2013). These and other economic factors have made employment more precarious. Consequently, those nearing graduation from school face the challenges of prolonged and uncertain school-to-work transition periods. The newly graduated face a challenge of competition for existing job openings. Moreover, they compete with highly trained and experienced individuals since many employers still pay attention to human capital (Hatch and Dyer, 2004). These factors limit employment opportunities available to new graduates; hence, a protean approach could be useful such that individuals can engage in mobility behaviors to further their career development. Career mobility is a feasible alternative in today's globalized and increasingly service-driven economy. This alternative presents two work opportunities; expatriation and entrepreneurship. There is also possibility of combining both mobility alternatives; that is expatriates who are engaged entrepreneurship (expatriate entrepreneurship) (Vance *et al.*, 2016).

The boundarylessness and protean nature of careers today demands that individuals become more flexible and adaptive to best manage their career development (Briscoe and Hall, 2006; Hall, 1996; Lent and Brown, 2013) to work even in unfamiliar environments. Moreover, the dynamics of labor market characterized by job insecurity, increased demand for services, high unemployment rates necessitate that individuals should be willing to consider non-traditional employment such as self-employment. Both expatriation and entrepreneurship not only provide opportunities for early career professionals to work towards achieving autonomy and career progress (Frändberg, 2015), they are important for long-term social and economic development through new business developments and knowledge spillover effects (Vance *et al.*, 2016). It is already well researched that entrepreneurship is an important contributor to economic development (Fritsch and Wyrwich, 2014; Williams *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, expatriation makes valuable contribution to hosting organizations and economies (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Dickmann and Baruch, 2011).

Career mobility has been widely studied in terms of working abroad, which is propelled by either immigration or self-initiated expatriation (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013). However, expatriation from developed to developing countries; and between developed countries seems to be on a downward trajectory (Selmer, 2017) despite globalization and other challenges in the labor market. Other forms of career mobility involve movement to new positions or transition to another occupation. An increasingly attractive form of geographical career mobility is expat entrepreneurship (Basaiawmoit, 2013; Vance *et al.*, 2016). The present study does not examine this phenomenon; it is assumed that since young professionals are increasingly willing to go abroad as business expatriates, expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions could therefore be predicted by the same protean attributes. The career profiles based on value and mobility dimensions of protean and boundaryless careers (Briscoe and Hall, 2006) suggest that geographical mobility and transition into business can reinforce each other; and can therefore have similar predictors.

The present study sought to examine the willingness of undergraduate students and early career professionals to expatriate or start their own businesses. We describe a protean career personality in terms of flexibility and personal initiative; which are essential for

protean career behaviors given that individuals with protean career orientation prefer to direct their careers (Hall, 1996). We thus test for effect of this protean career personality on expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions. Briscoe and Hall (2006) argue that a person's career orientation is shaped by a career mindset. This suggests that career orientation might be the mechanism through which protean traits affect mobility intentions and behaviors. We therefore test whether the effects of protean traits on mobility intentions are mediated by career orientation.

The protean career personality

The paper focuses on the association between protean traits (personal initiative and flexibility) on mobility intentions (specifically expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions). We argue that these two mobility behaviors are typically protean in nature. Specifically, self-initiated expatriation reflect individual's proactivity (Selmer *et al.*, 2017) in managing their careers; and expatriation is frequently being used by young professionals to enhance career development (Dickmann, 2017). We, therefore, suggest that early career professionals with high levels of personal initiative and flexibility; as well as career orientation are likely to be more ready to engage in these mobility behaviors.

It has been suggested that twenty-first century careers will be "protean" (Briscoe and Hall, 2006; Inkson, 2006), meaning that they will be driven by individuals, rather than by organizations. Self-initiated expatriation and voluntary entry into entrepreneurship are therefore expressions of protean career behaviors. Based on the person-fit perspective, we hypothesize that individuals characterized by a protean personality and attitude are more likely to consider expatriation or entrepreneurial career paths or both (expatriate entrepreneurship). Findings of research from the field of person environment fit indicate that career functioning is best when there is a good fit, and moreover is a determinant of stability in the career path (Holland, 1996). From this perspective, individuals choose work environments as a result of many different factors, including their attitudes, values, abilities, personality, and job characteristics, as well as factors relating to organizational structure and culture (Van Vianen, 2000). Selection of a career path based on congruence between these personal and work-related factors enhance likelihoods of success and satisfaction (Holland, 1996, 1997). Yet the selected environments further reinforce abilities and interests, hence facilitating success and persistence in the chosen career path. This also applies to expatriates; previous research suggests that a combination of individual and contextual factors affect success of expatriates (Kubra *et al.*, 2015).

Perceived congruence between person and work environment factors; and the expected success that follows this fit; have been shown to affect career selection (Johnson and Birkeland, 2003; Spokane *et al.*, 2000). This indicates a higher readiness for a given career path. Hence, it can be expected that there are some people who are overall more ready to think about a job abroad or in business than others based on their personal characteristics and their perceived suitability to these career paths. Based on Holland's theory of vocational personalities (Holland, 1996, 1997), person environment fit application to career research has emphasized the role of personality on career selection. From recent career literature emphasizing self-management and adaptability as requirements for contemporary careers (Arthur, 2014; Hamtiaux *et al.*, 2013; Lent and Brown, 2013; Lent *et al.*, 2016), we focus on two personal characteristics (rather personal competences), namely personal initiative and flexibility. We posit that these two traits describe what we label "protean personality," which are important for career paths in expatriate work or entrepreneurship. This is in line with Briscoe and Hall (2006) definition highlighting that protean careers involve two aspects; individual's internal values and self-direction in one's career management. These aspects indicate that career direction and success are partly dependent on a person's values and adaptability in career-related matters including decisions, choices, and activities.

These two aspects emphasize the role of personal initiative and flexibility to career management; and we therefore argue in the present study that they are predisposing factors to readiness for mobility (to expatriate or become an entrepreneur) as indicated in our hypothesized model (see Figure 1).

Personal initiative

Personal initiative is both theoretically and practically significant for career management, including achieving success in the labor market and dealing with challenging career situations (Frese and Fay, 2001; Frese *et al.*, 1997). Its relevance to the protean career concept is embodied in goal-directed behaviors such as proactivity and self-starting, persistence, and long-term focus (Fay and Frese, 2001; Frese *et al.*, 1996, 1997). The aspects of being proactive and self-starting could especially be important for self-initiated expatriation; which involves individuals seeking work abroad on their own initiative (Selmer *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, initiating an expatriation process by oneself demonstrates a proactive approach, which is the core facet of the personal initiative trait (Fay and Frese, 2001). Such expatriates engage in activities including gathering information about relevant job opportunities abroad, selecting a country, and undertaking the tedious process of convincing possible employers and navigating the immigration process (Selmer *et al.*, 2017), which are largely facilitated by personal initiative. We therefore posit that undergraduate students as well as early career professionals who possess high levels of the personal initiative trait are likely to report higher intention to work abroad.

Concerning entrepreneurial intentions, personal initiative is closely linked to the concept of entrepreneurship, since entrepreneurial activities require creative and active capabilities (Frese *et al.*, 1997; Solomon *et al.*, 2013). This is in line with Holland’s description of enterprising individuals and the nature of careers that they thrive in (Holland, 1997). Consequently, it is expected that individuals with initiative competence would be attracted to and succeed in entrepreneurship (Frese and Fay, 2001; Frese *et al.*, 1997; Glaub *et al.*, 2014; Rooks *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, a related personality construct, proactive personality, has been found to predict entrepreneurial intention in several studies (e.g. Crant, 1996; Dell and Amadu, 2015; Prabhu *et al.*, 2012).

The innovative and creative requirements of entrepreneurship are likely pull factors for individuals with high personal initiative trait to engage in entrepreneurial activities. We therefore expect that personal initiative predicts intention to engage in business. If this hypothesis is true, then low levels of initiative would be a fitting explanation of relatively low levels of entrepreneurship that was previously observed in some parts of Germany. Literature indicates that particularly in parts of East Germany, initiative was for some time perceived as bad thing and often punished (Frese *et al.*, 1997). Based on this literature,

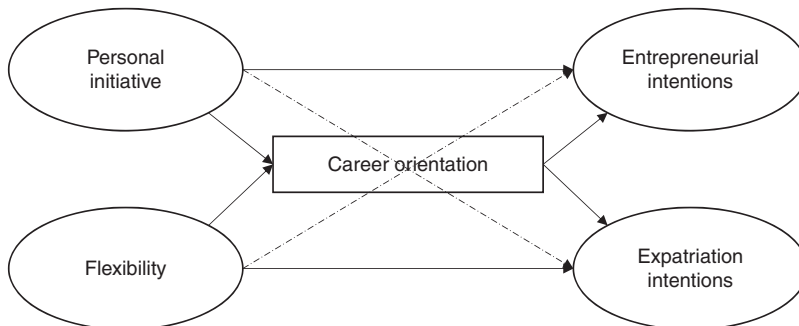


Figure 1.
The hypothesized
model

we can expect personal initiative to predict both the readiness to engage in expatriate work and to go into entrepreneurship:

H1a. Personal initiative is positively related to expatriation intention.

H1b. Personal initiative is positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

Flexibility

Hossiep and Paschen (1998) categorize flexibility as an important vocational trait (see: Bochumer Inventory for work-based personality description, Business-focused Inventory of Personality (BIP)). In the discourse of career development in the twenty-first century, scholars have advocated for flexibility and adaptability for increased chances of career success. Accordingly, malleability in decision making enables individuals to manage career transitions and cope with changes in conditions (Hartung *et al.*, 2008; Koen *et al.*, 2012; Lent and Brown, 2013). Thus adaptability becomes an important predictor of career success (Zacher, 2014), but also the readiness to try new career possibilities when required; for example during school-to-work transitions (Koen *et al.*, 2012) or re-employment after job loss coping (Koen *et al.*, 2010).

Regarding mobility, flexibility facilitates coping with tasks and conditions during expatriation (Baruch *et al.*, 2016; Briscoe and Hall, 2006; Tung, 1982). Flexibility enhances openness to situations, including new cultures which do not only increase adaptation but also willingness to work in new places (Froese *et al.*, 2013). Literature also suggests that flexibility can shape the direction of career (Briscoe and Hall, 2006), thus the potential to influence an individual's career path. In relation to expatriation, there is remarkable increase in self-initiated expatriation (Baruch *et al.*, 2016; Bozionelos, 2009; Doherty *et al.*, 2013). This indicates willingness to expatriate; hence suggesting that some individuals seem to be more ready to work abroad.

Similarly, success in entrepreneurial roles requires high level of flexibility for effective functioning in the highly dynamic business environment; facilitating learning from experiences and adaptability in business decisions and actions (Haynie *et al.*, 2010). Yet this adaptability has been found to relate to entrepreneurial intentions in some populations (Urban, 2012). From the person environment fit theories, particularly Holland's typology of career environments (Holland, 1997), flexible work trait fits with the requirements of both entrepreneurial and expatriation roles, hence we expect that flexibility will predict both intentions to expatriate and go engage entrepreneurial activity:

H2a. Flexibility work trait is positively related to expatriation intention.

H2b. Flexibility work trait is positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

Career attitudes as mediating link

People choose certain careers or transition from one career to another for different reasons, which Schein (1996) labeled as career anchors. From the taxonomy of eight anchors (Schein, 1996), it is observed that at least three, including autonomy, dedication, and pure challenge are situated in the concept of values and attitudes (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2013). This illustrates the importance of attitudes in understanding career interests and choices. Lent *et al.* (1994) also demonstrate the essentiality of attitudes in understanding career interests and choices. They define attitudes in terms of likes, dislikes, and indifference; hence, the career interests are a subject matter of attitudes, which eventually influence choices. Expatriation and entrepreneurship studies have shown the impact of attitudes on intention and on actual behavior (e.g. Douglas and Shepherd, 2002; Fayolle and Gailly, 2015;

Froese *et al.*, 2013). In the present study, we focus on one such attitude that is important to protean and boundaryless careers, namely career orientation.

Career orientation attitude is largely reflected in the expression of career ambition (Otto *et al.*, 2017) and denotes the resolute desire to attain one's vocational goals (Maier *et al.*, 2009). This approach of understanding career orientation particularly emphasizes the preference for intrinsic over extrinsic rewards from the career activities (Simpson, 2005) in line with self-determination perspective (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2008). We presume that this desire might constrain or enhance the intention to expatriate or become an entrepreneur, or both (for those who want to become expat entrepreneurs). Stumpf (2014) argues that individuals use mobility to advance their career success. Towards this regard, we argue that expatriation, which involves professionals offering their expertise to foreign organizations and governments (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013) is an opportunity for career success. Recent trends in expatriation also reveal that early career professionals are currently motivated for expatriate work mostly for purposes that are related to career growth; that is, individuals will accept or reject international assignments in relation to how it will impact on their career (Dickmann, 2017). Especially, they seem to be driven by the need to strengthen their social capital through creating an international professional network (Dickmann, 2017). We therefore posit that individuals with high career orientation are likely to have positive attitudes towards working abroad; thus possess a higher readiness for expatriate work.

Still based on the idea that career orientation is an expression of need for achievement in career (Otto *et al.*, 2017), we argue that individuals with high career orientation are likely to have higher entrepreneurial intentions. Previous research has consistently found that achievement motivation is one of the psychological attributes that motivate entrepreneurial behavior (Hansemark, 2003; Johnson, 1990; Wu *et al.*, 2007). In addition, Hall (1996) contends that individuals' career behaviors are increasingly driven by psychological rather than economic benefits. Psychological outcomes of work such as satisfaction and well-being have been reported to be high among the self-employed or entrepreneurs compared to their counterparts in salaried employment (Benz and Frey, 2008; Binder and Coad, 2013). Moreover, some professions such as medicine, psychology, engineering, information technology, and many others do offer good entrepreneurship opportunities that are professionally related in form of innovations, consulting, and freelancing. Based on this literature, we hypothesize that:

H3a. Career orientation is positively related to expatriation intention.

H3b. Career orientation is positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

The socio-cognitive approach highlights a triadic interaction of contextual, personal and cognitive factors in influencing career behaviors (Lent *et al.*, 2000; Lent *et al.*, 1994). On this foundation, they propose that cognitive processes mediate the impact of personal and socialization factors on subsequent career behavior. Thus, we hypothesize that career orientation attitude mediates the impact of personal initiative and flexibility traits on expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions. Lent *et al.* (1994) illustrate the mediational role of attitudes by defining career interests in terms of likes, dislikes and indifference; which develop from interactions with the environment. Attitudes are often treated as a mediator in expatriation and entrepreneurship studies (e.g. Froese *et al.*, 2013; Kautonen *et al.*, 2011). Following this idea, we therefore expect that a protean personality predisposes individuals to be high on career orientation, which in turn may shape the development of career mobility intentions whether to expatriate or become an entrepreneur:

H4a. Career orientation mediates the effect of personal initiative on expatriation intention.

H4b. Career orientation mediates the effect of personal initiative on entrepreneurial intention.

- H4c.* Career orientation mediates the effect of flexibility work trait on expatriation intention.
- H4d.* Career orientation mediates the effect of flexibility work trait on entrepreneurial intention.

Empirical studies

Two studies were conducted in Germany to test our hypotheses. In study 1, we selected a sample of undergraduate students across a range of disciplines who at time of data assessment were enrolled as full-time university students. For study 2, we used a sample of early career professionals who successfully managed to enter the labor market. All of them had graduated with a diploma in psychology.

Study 1: undergraduates during their training period

Sample and procedure

Data from 442 German undergraduate students aged between 18 and 54 years ($M = 23.05$; $SD = 3.50$) were gathered via an online survey. The sample consisted of 167 business management students (47.9 percent male), 161 psychology students (14.3 percent male), and 114 students of engineering and natural science (77.2 percent male). With respect to prior experiences, 128 students had been abroad for more than three months, and 94.6 percent had changed their location at least once ($M = 2.19$; $SD = 1.92$). Only 3.6 percent had parental duties to fulfill, and 38.2 percent were in a partnership or married.

Research instruments

For all items measured, a six-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) was used. The scales are described below.

Career mobility. Expatriation intentions were assessed using the four most valid items of a scale to measure geographic mobility readiness by Dalbert and Otto (2004). Note the original scale was modified in a way that all items were now related to the context of foreign countries ($\alpha = 0.86$; e.g. "I can easily image myself working for a limited time abroad."). To assess entrepreneurial intentions we selected the four most valid items from a scale to measure entrepreneurial mobility readiness by Glaser and Dalbert (2004; $\alpha = 0.90$; e.g. "To set up a business of my own is part of my professional goals").

Protean career mindset. We identified two personality concepts relevant for protean career development, namely adaptability (Hall, 2002) and self-directedness (Briscoe and Hall, 2006) and assessed these using work-based flexibility and personal initiative. Personal initiative was assessed with 7 items (Frese *et al.*, 1997; $\alpha = 0.78$; e.g. "Whenever there is a chance to get actively involved, I take it."). Flexibility was gathered with the 14 items of the flexibility subscale of theBIP (Hossiep and Paschen, 1998; $\alpha = 0.83$; e.g. "I perceive it as a challenge when I am confronted with unforeseeable situations").

Career attitudes. Career orientation was measured using a scale from the German General Social Survey (Koch *et al.*, 1994) which comprised 4 items ($\alpha = 0.75$; e.g. "To be successful in my profession is very important to me").

Analytic strategy and pre-analysis

Latent-variable structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS (Arbuckle, 2012) was used for testing the hypotheses separately for the two samples. Baron and Kenny (1986) argue that SEM is an adequate method to analyze mediation paths. To test *H1a-b* and *H2a-b*, we built a model with no mediation through career orientation (M_0). Furthermore, we adapted a two-step procedure introduced by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to test our proposed mediation model with the mediator career orientation (see Figure 1).

First, we tested if the measurement model was fundamentally misspecified by employing a pseudo χ^2 test. In particular, we related the χ^2 value of the confirmatory measurement model, also known as saturated structural model (M_{1a}) that included all latent constructs (i.e. personal initiative and flexibility as independent variables, and entrepreneurial intentions and expatriate intentions as dependent variables). The model also included the observed constructs (i.e. career orientation, age, and gender) and all possible parameters relating those constructs to the dfs of a null structural model (M_{1b}) that included the same constructs but without any parameters relating those constructs. We recognized that χ^2/df values ≤ 3 indicate that a structural model nested in M_0 exists with an acceptable goodness of fit. The observed variables were included in the measurement model to ensure that the subsequent structural equation models were nested to this measurement model. Sex and age were introduced as controls since former research show that individual characteristics impact on mobility intentions (Tekleselassie and Villarreal, 2011). We randomly assigned the items to two parcels for each latent constructs in order to avoid the pitfalls of assessing the latent constructs with multiple items (Little *et al.*, 2002).

Second, we continued the two-step approach by testing if a less or a more constrained alternative model fitted the data better than our proposed model (M_{2a}) with sequential χ^2 difference tests and the decision-tree framework proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In particular, since our proposed model constrained only one parameter more than the saturated structural model (M_{1a}), the saturated structural model was the only possible less constrained model. As the more constrained model we used a mediation model similar to our proposed model, but without a direct effect of personal initiative on expatriate intentions (M_{2b}).

Furthermore, we estimated the adequacy of the measurement and structural models by examining the χ^2 in relation to its degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the comparative-fit-index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis-Index (TLI). We recognized χ^2/df values ≤ 3 (Kline, 2004), RMSEA values ≤ 0.07 (Steiger, 2007), SRMR values ≤ 0.09 , CFI values ≥ 0.95 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) and TLI values ≥ 0.90 (Bentler and Bonett, 1980) as indicative for an adequate fit.

Possible mediation effects were examined using bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effects, since it has several advantages over Baron and Kenny's (1986) method of mediation analysis and the Sobel's test of indirect effects (Hayes, 2013). Specifically, we considered indirect effects with bootstrapped 95 percent confidence intervals containing zero non-significant and indirect effects with bootstrapped 95 percent confidence intervals not containing zero significant.

To deal with potential risks of common method variance (CMV), we followed suggestions made by (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) and applied Harman's single-factor test, which entails modeling all of the manifested items as indicators of a single factor that represents method effects. Williams, Cote, and Buckley (1989) demonstrated that about one quarter of the variance in the measures examined in past literature on self-reported perceptions at work was attributable to method effects; which indeed in the fields of psychology or sociology tends to be even higher at 28.9 percent (Cote and Buckley, 1987). Harman's single-factor test revealed a poor fit to the data for the sample of undergraduate students ($\chi^2 = 3821.64$, $\text{df} = 495$, $\text{TLI} = 0.29$, $\text{CFI} = 0.37$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.12$), as well as for the sample of early career professionals (described later in study 2) ($\chi^2 = 1350.03$, $\text{df} = 377$, $\text{TLI} = 0.28$, $\text{CFI} = 0.37$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.16$). In addition, the Harman's single-factor test indicated that CMV is not substantial in our data. Hence we did not consider the common method factor (CMF) in our analysis since it tends to affect identification of the models (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations for all measures are presented in Table I.

The model without mediation (M_0) yielded acceptable model fit (except in the χ^2/df values; see Table II) and revealed that in line with *H1a* personal initiative had a positive effect on entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.001$). However, in relation to *H1b*, personal initiative had no effect on expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.07$; $p = 0.35$). Concerning flexibility, we found a positive effect on expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.31$; $p < 0.001$) confirming *H2b* but not on entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.04$; $p = 0.60$) whereby disconfirming *H2a*.

Two-step model testing

The pseudo χ^2 test ($\chi^2/df = 1.68$) revealed that a sub-model nested in the confirmatory measurement model (M_{1a}) with an acceptable goodness of fit existed. Thus, our measurement model did not suffer from fundamental misspecifications. Moreover, M_{1a} yielded acceptable values for RMSEA, CFI, and TLI. (see Table II).

In the sequential χ^2 difference test we first compared the saturated structural model (M_{1a}) with our proposed model (M_{2a}). This χ^2 difference test revealed that our proposed model (M_{2a}) fitted not significantly worse than the saturated structural model (M_{1a}), $\chi^2_{Diff} = 0.68$, $df_{Diff} = 1$, n.s. However, the more constrained model without mediation of the effects of flexibility (M_{2b}) fitted not significantly worse than our proposed model (M_{2a}), $\chi^2_{Diff} = 0.01$, $df_{Diff} = 1$, n.s., and the saturated structural model (M_{1a}), $\chi^2_{Diff} = 0.69$, $df_{Diff} = 2$, n.s. Hence, all models were equally fitting the data. Thus, according to the suggestion of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) we accepted M_{2b} since it was the most constrained model. Moreover, M_{2b} yielded acceptable values for RMSEA, CFI, and TLI (see Table II).

The accepted model (M_{2b}) revealed that in line with *H3a* and *H3b*, career orientation was significantly related to entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$) and expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$). With respect to *H4a-d*, we argued that career orientation mediates the relationships between personal initiative and expatriation intention (*H4a*) as

Table I.
Descriptive findings and correlation of the sample of undergraduate students (study 1)

	<i>M</i>	SD	α	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)
Personal initiative	4.41	0.64	0.77	(A)	1			
Flexibility	3.64	0.66	0.84	(B)	0.43***	1		
Career orientation	4.20	0.83	0.73	(C)	0.37***	0.15***	1	
Entrepreneurial intentions	3.82	1.31	0.91	(D)	0.23***	0.18***	0.34***	1
Expatriate intentions	4.50	1.16	0.85	(E)	0.19***	0.31***	0.14***	0.14***

Notes: $N = 442$. *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table II.
Fit indices for the sample of undergraduate student (study 1)

	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Model without mediation (M_0)	74.93	23	3.26	0.07	0.04	0.97	0.94
<i>Step 1</i>							
Confirmatory measurement model (M_{1a})	78.92	26	3.04	0.07	0.03	0.97	0.94
Null structural model (M_{1b})	–	47	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Step 2</i>							
Proposed model (M_{2a})	79.60	27	2.95	0.07	0.04	0.97	0.94
Accepted model (M_{2b})	79.61	28	2.85	0.07	0.04	0.97	0.94

Note: Only the dfs of M_{1b} are needed (for the pseudo χ^2 test)

well as entrepreneurial intention (*H4b*). We further posited that the relationships between flexibility and expatriate intentions (*H4c*) and entrepreneurial intentions (*H4d*) are mediated by career orientation attitude. As illustrated in Figure 2, personal initiative was significantly related to career orientation ($\beta = 0.51, p < 0.001$). However, flexibility was not significantly related to career orientation ($\beta = -0.09, p = 0.16$). According to the bootstrap results, career orientation only mediated the effects of personal initiative on entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.14$; Boot LLCI = 0.21, Boot ULCI = 0.58), confirming *H4b*. No significant indirect effect of personal initiative on expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.05$; Boot LLCI = -0.01, Boot ULCI = 0.30), hence *H4a* is not supported. In addition, the indirect effects of flexibility on entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = -0.03$; Boot LLCI = -0.16, Boot ULCI = 0.02) and expatriate intentions ($\beta = -0.01$; Boot LLCI = -0.09, Boot ULCI = 0.01) via career orientation attitude were not significant (see Figure 1). Thus, *H4c* and *H4d* are not confirmed.

Study 2: early career professionals after managing the labor market entry

Sample and procedure

A sample of early career psychology professionals (graduates) in Germany was recruited using again an online survey. Overall, 154 psychologists participated and answered the online questionnaire (rate of return: one third of all contacted graduates). We excluded self-employed and unemployed participants (54) from our analyses. The self-employed were excluded because they already had already selected the entrepreneurial path; while the unemployed were excluded because the study focused on analysis of mobility intentions of early career professionals who had already succeeded at labor market entry. Of the remaining 100 participants, 78 percent were female, 52 percent worked in the field of Clinical Psychology, and 55 percent held a supervisory position.

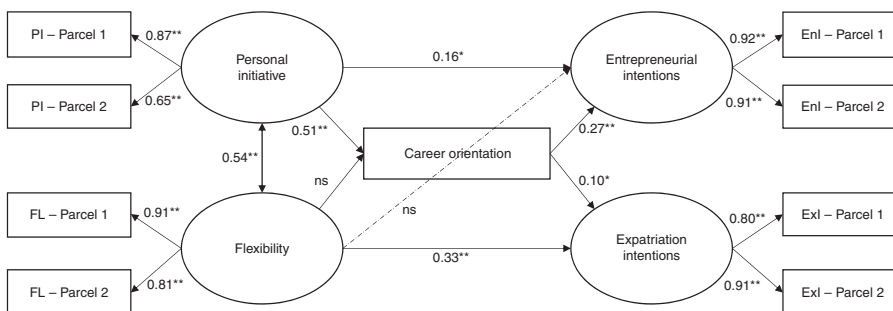
Instruments and analytical strategy

We used the same measures for all assessed constructs as reported in study 1. All measures, showed acceptable reliability coefficients (see Table III) as defined by Nunnally (1978) who recommends Cronbach’s α of 0.70 as the cutoff. The same analytic procedure used in study 1 was also applied to study 2.

Results

Means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and reliability for all measures are presented in Table III.

The model without mediation (M_0) yielded acceptable model fit (see Table IV) and revealed that personal initiative had no effect on expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.10; p = 0.45$) nor on entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.18; p = 0.16$). Hence, *H1a* and *H1b* that



Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Figure 2. Standardized coefficients for the accepted model for the sample of current university students (study 1)

hypothesized positive relationships between personal initiative and expatriation intention, as well between personal initiative and entrepreneurial intention, were not supported for the sample of early career professionals. However, we found significant effects of flexibility on expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.33; p < 0.01$), confirming *H2a* that hypothesized a positive relationship between flexibility and expatriation intention. We also found a positive relationship between flexibility and entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.23; p < 0.05$), confirming *H2b*.

Measurement model testing

The pseudo χ^2 test ($\chi^2/df = 0.74$) revealed that a sub-model nested in the confirmatory measurement model (M_{1a}) with an acceptable goodness of fit existed. Thus, our measurement model did not suffer from fundamental misspecifications. Moreover, M_0 yielded acceptable values for RMSEA, CFI, and TLI (see Table IV).

Structural model testing

In the sequential χ^2 difference test, we first compared the saturated structural model (M_{1a}) with our proposed model (M_{2a}). This χ^2 difference test revealed that our proposed model (M_{2a}) fitted not significantly worse than the saturated structural model (M_{1a}), $\chi^2_{Diff} = 0.73$, $df_{Diff} = 1$, ns. However, also the more constrained model without mediation of the effects of flexibility (M_{2b}) fitted not significantly worse than our proposed model (M_{2a}), $\chi^2_{Diff} = 0.20$, $df_{Diff} = 1$, ns., and the saturated structural model (M_{1a}), $\chi^2_{Diff} = 0.93$, $df_{Diff} = 2$, ns. Hence, all models were equally fitting the data. Thus, according to the suggestion of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) we accepted M_{2b} since it was the most constrained model. Moreover, M_3 yielded acceptable values for RMSEA, CFI, and TLI (see Table IV).

The accepted model (M_{2b}) revealed that, contrary to our hypotheses, career orientation was not significantly related to expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.15, p = 0.15$) and entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.05, p = 0.76$). These results disconfirm *H3a* and *H3b*, respectively that suggested positive relationships between career orientation attitude and intentions for

Table III.
Descriptive findings and correlation for the sample of early career professionals (Study 2)

	M	SD	α	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	
Personal initiative	4.28	0.72	0.86	(A)	1				
Flexibility	3.64	0.70	0.88	(B)	0.45***	1			
Career orientation	4.09	0.88	0.83	(C)	0.65***	0.25**	1		
Entrepreneurial intentions	3.74	1.47	0.92	(D)	0.29***	0.31***	0.23**	1	
Expatriate intentions	4.19	1.38	0.85	(E)	0.24**	0.37***	0.22**	0.08	1

Notes: $N = 100$. ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table IV.
Fit indices for the sample early career professionals (Study 2)

	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Model without mediation (M_0)	32.20	23	1.40	0.06	0.03	0.98	0.96
<i>Step 1</i>							
Confirmatory measurement model (M_{1a})	34.63	26	1.33	0.06	0.02	0.99	0.97
Null structural model (M_{1b})	-	47	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Step 2</i>							
Proposed model (M_{2a})	35.36	27	1.31	0.06	0.04	0.99	0.97
Accepted model (M_{2b})	35.56	28	1.27	0.05	0.04	0.99	0.97

Note: Only the dfs of M_{1b} are needed (for the pseudo χ^2 test)

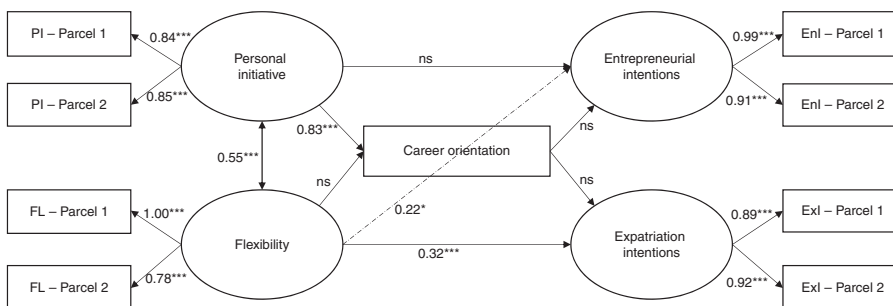
expatriation and entrepreneurship. With respect mediation effects (*H4a-d*), we posited that career orientation mediates the relationships between the two protean career factors (personal initiative and flexibility) and mobility intentions (expatriation and intentions). As illustrated in Figure 3, personal initiative was significantly related to career orientation ($\beta = 0.83, p < 0.001$). However, flexibility was not significantly related to career orientation ($\beta = -0.14, p = 0.13$). According to the bootstrap results, there were no significant indirect effect of personal initiative on expatriate intentions ($\beta = 0.13$, Boot LLCI = -0.39 , Boot ULCI = 1.24). Hence *H4a* that suggested a mediation effect of career orientation in the relationship between personal initiative and expatriate intentions is not supported. The bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals further revealed no significant indirect effects of personal initiative on entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.06$, Boot LLCI = -0.86 , Boot ULCI = 0.96), disconfirming *H4b*. In addition, we hypothesized mediation effects of career orientation attitude in the relationship between flexibility and expatriation intention (*H4c*) as well as relationship between flexibility and entrepreneurial intention (*H4d*). As shown in Figure 3, these hypotheses are also not supported, since we found non-significant indirect effects of flexibility on expatriation intentions ($\beta = -0.02$, Boot LLCI = -0.61 , Boot ULCI = 0.04) and on entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = -0.01$, Boot LLCI = -0.33 , Boot ULCI = 0.11).

Discussion

The current labor market highlights the importance of protean career mindset and behaviors for especially young people today who are faced with unemployment challenge or preparing for the task of school-to-work transition. Particularly, the need to be mobile has been strongly advocated for. In the present studies, we examined the impact of protean personality traits (as reflected in two personality attributes of personal initiative and flexibility) and career orientation attitude on mobility intentions (specifically expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions); and whether the impact of personal initiative and flexibility on mobility intentions are mediated by career orientation attitude.

Flexibility and mobility intentions

The results of both studies indicated that flexibility had substantial positive effect on expatriation intentions, yet almost similar effects sizes in both studies (study 1 with a sample of undergraduate students and study 2 with a sample of early career professionals, i.e. recent graduates of psychology). However, flexibility was related to entrepreneurial intentions only among the sample of early career professionals, and not in the student sample. This implies that for individuals who are already working, flexibility plays a role in willingness to be mobile (both willingness to work abroad or to start one's own business).



Notes: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Figure 3. Standardized coefficients for the accepted model for the sample of recent psychology graduates (study 2)

Amongst the undergraduate students' sample, flexibility only matters when considering expatriate work. However, flexibility is less important when it comes to entrepreneurial intentions. It should be noted that during the course of training, students only have selected the course of study, but may not have firm thoughts or decisions about career path options. Students with strong flexibility trait, yet focused on professional career success, may therefore think of expatriation as a more viable career path than entrepreneurship. This could also be because many undergraduate students could have had international internship experiences which sensitizes them to expatriate work (Mather, 2008; Ryan *et al.*, 2013; Stumpf, 2014). Contrary to the socialization towards expatriation work, entrepreneurial socialization through training of direct experience during university study seems to be limited for only those students pursuing business related courses (Robinson and Haynes, 1991). Hence, there is a possibility that the influence of flexibility on undergraduate students' choice for expatriation or entrepreneurship is affected by professional socialization.

For early career professionals, on the other hand, flexibility might enable them to have open minds towards expatriate work and entrepreneurship. There are two possible explanations for this relationship. First, flexibility in career decisions is related to openness for new career experiences as well as managing career transitions (Froese *et al.*, 2013; Koen *et al.*, 2012). Hence, for flexible graduates, who are either in the process of transiting from school to work, or seeking new career experiences, both expatriation and entrepreneurship are attractive career paths. Second, psychology is one of the professions with massive potential for self-employment through private practice (e.g. we excluded 35.07 percent of psychology graduates in study 2 from the analysis because they were already self-employed). Yet psychologists (particularly at high level of training) in private practice tend to earn more than their counterparts (Finno *et al.*, 2010). Hence, private practice, just like expatriation, is an attractive career path for psychology graduates with high level of flexibility. However, with an increase in the number of people engaged in expatriate entrepreneurship, it would be interesting for recent graduates of psychology but also other subjects to engage in private practice abroad, where the demand for psychological services such as organizational consulting might be high in currently industrializing countries.

Personal initiative and mobility intentions

Concerning the role of personal initiative, our results revealed that it is not related to expatriation intentions across both samples (undergraduate students and early career professionals). It therefore seems that personal initiative matters less regarding willingness to work abroad. Although previous studies have indicated that personal initiative plays a role in exhibiting proactive career behaviors (Frese and Fay, 2001; Ito, 2003). We posit that expatriation belongs to the category of proactive career behaviors, where people seek career development and success in unfamiliar geographical location. This is especially true in the case self-initiated expatriation (Selmer *et al.*, 2017). It could therefore be of interest to scholars to further examine the relationship between personal initiative and readiness for expatriate work in different populations or across countries. It is possible that the negligible effects of personal initiative on expatriation intentions in our studies are related to the limited sample scope. However, in relation to entrepreneurial intentions, our hypothesis that proactivity plays a significant role was supported among the sample of current students (study 1). Nonetheless, it was not supported among recent psychology graduates (again, which could be an effect of the sampling scope). The relationship could be somewhat different among early career professionals for different fields of study, in line with prior expatriation (e.g. Mather, 2008; Ryan *et al.*, 2013; Stumpf, 2014) and entrepreneurial (e.g. Nabi *et al.*, 2017; Starr and Fondas, 1992) socialization literature.

The mediating role of career orientation

In this paper, we have conceptualized that protean personality traits are characterized by two traits of personal initiative and flexibility. We hypothesized that a protean attitude, namely career orientation, is likely to be the mechanism through which protean traits affect mobility intentions (expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions). Results of study 1 revealed that career orientation is related to both expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduate students. However, the same effects were not found in the sample of early career professionals. In addition, career orientation was not affected by flexibility in both samples. On the contrary, we found that personal initiative has positive significant relationships with career orientation of both samples. The striving for professional excellence describes the core essence of career orientation (Maier *et al.*, 2009; Otto *et al.*, 2017). In the era of protean and boundaryless careers, being proactive and taking career initiatives are some of the ways that people achieve career success (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, individuals with high level of career orientation are likely to exhibit proactive behaviors that enhance career development; which may be reflected in readiness to be mobile; that is either expatriating or going into entrepreneurship or both.

Moreover, our mediation model hypothesized that the personal initiative and flexibility affect expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions through career orientation. However, indirect effects were only significant for the relationship between personal initiative and entrepreneurial intention among the sample of undergraduate students (study 1). Career-oriented individuals tend to value career success highly (Ellemers *et al.*, 1998), with high desire for achievement (Otto *et al.*, 2017). Yet entrepreneurship offers both opportunities for individuals to pursue their high career ambitions and exercise their creativity and innovativeness. On the other hand, expatriation offers opportunities for success for some individuals (Ramaswami *et al.*, 2016), it does not necessarily offer opportunities to exercise one's creativity. Hence, entrepreneurship is a desirable career path for individuals, particularly students, with both high personal initiative and career orientation. However, with increasing interest in entrepreneurial expatriation (Basaiaawmoit, 2013; Vance *et al.*, 2016), it is now possible that expatriation work offers opportunities for creative and achievement oriented individuals. We therefore encourage that future mobility research to the role of proactivity and career orientation (or career achievement motivation) in readiness for expatriate entrepreneurship.

Limitations and future research

Our studies have a number of limitations and potentials that should be considered. Concerning the limitations, only self-report measures were used. Therefore, we cannot rule out the effect of shared method bias that might magnify the observed relationships among the variables. However, according to our analyses regarding common method effects this problem does not seem to be severe in both studies. In addition, it has been suggested that common methods challenge tend to be limited in studies using multiple item measures with high reliability (Fuller *et al.*, 2016).

Another challenge relates to the cross sectional nature of the studies. This restricts the confirmation of the causality between the measures. Additionally, we studied a sample of undergraduate students and early career professionals in the field of psychology (only) in Germany. This limited sample scope poses a challenge to generalization of our findings to students in, for example, less developed countries or early career professionals in other fields. Intentions for expatriate work as well for entrepreneurship develop over time. This is related to the socialization process that occurs during training at school or practical experiences (Nabi *et al.*, 2017; Porter and Umbach, 2006; Ryan *et al.*, 2013, 2015; Starr and Fondas, 1992). Therefore, longitudinal studies might be appropriate to studying the formation of expatriation and entrepreneurial (and expatriate entrepreneurship) intentions. Future studies might benefit from investigating robust cross-cultural samples at multiple time points.

Despite these limitations, the present studies contribute to expatriation and entrepreneurial intention. The studies also contribute to the growing literature on expatriation and entrepreneurship; individuals who are interested in entrepreneurship are likely to hold intentions to work abroad. Another contribution regards substantiating the factors that impact the formation of mobility intentions and preferences at different levels of career development. Particularly, we test our hypotheses with a sample of undergraduate university students (training period) as well as a sample of early career professionals (after professional entry or in school-to-work transition). We could observe several similarities in the results with both samples, for example, the relationship between flexibility and expatriation intention. This to some extent offsets the weakness of correlational data and self-report measures.

Implications for practice

Results of our studies indicate that protean traits, flexibility and personal initiative, as well as career orientation attitude play important roles in choosing mobility career paths. Particularly, results of both studies show that flexibility is related to willingness to expatriate among undergraduate students and early career professionals in the psychology field; but also entrepreneurship intentions among early career professionals. Career orientation was also found to be essential for both expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions among sample of current students. However, career orientation could not mediate these effects in both studies. In contrast to that, to possess personal initiative seems to be a key factor in considering entrepreneurship for individuals still in professional training (undergraduate students), but not early career professionals. Our results indicate that personal initiative has the highest correlations with career orientation, as shown in the models of both studies. Nonetheless, career orientation only mediated the personal initiative-entrepreneurial intentions link in the student sample but not in the sample of early career professionals. Early career professionals who already have jobs have already made a decision regarding their career path. This limits the role of career orientation and other factors. It is only those who are high in flexibility trait or those not satisfied in their current work that may consider transiting into expatriate work or entrepreneurship. For students, however, a strong career orientation could work as a guidance principle in exploring their opportunities and making professional choices.

These findings have implications particularly for vocational counseling and career guidance as well interventions seeking to promote career mobility among young people. In general, for the students (those still in their education/training period), the specific protean personality concept plays a role as it shows a differential pattern of relationships. Whereas for entrepreneurial intentions, personal initiative is a central key; for expatriate intentions flexibility is essential. For those already working in their chosen profession, the role of personal initiative vanished and only flexibility could be regarded as a resource when it comes to higher expatriate or entrepreneurial intentions. Hence, practitioners could gear their efforts towards enhancing students' potential for proactive career behaviors and career orientation attitude to increase students' likelihood of choosing the entrepreneurial path. To increase students' willingness to work abroad, practitioners should particularly focus on flexibility. However, early career professionals, increasing their potential for career flexibility likely shape both intentions that to work abroad and to go into business. In a highly globalized working world, with exacerbated unemployment and job insecurity, both mobility options (expatriation and entrepreneurship) may provide practical opportunities for a fast school-to-work transition and career development. Moreover, socializing and motivating early career professionals towards both expatriation and entrepreneurship could be essential for increasing expatriation opportunities.

Conclusion

Taken together, the studies presented in this paper demonstrate that protean-like traits and attitudes are potential contributors to the understanding of career mobility preferences and consequently mobility behaviors. We have demonstrated that personal initiative and flexibility are essential traits in predicting intention to expatriate or to engage in entrepreneurship; and that career orientation attitude is a mediating mechanism between protean traits and readiness to be mobile. However, our findings have showed that the relevance of these traits and career orientation to predicting mobility intentions varies among populations. We found high entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduate students with high personal initiative. On the other hand, we found high expatriation intention among those high on flexibility trait. For the early career professionals, flexibility predicted both expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions. Moreover, we found career orientation relevant for both expatriation and entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduate students but not among early career professionals. We hope that our findings can stimulate increased inquiry on the role of protean traits and attitudes to international mobility, including entrepreneurial expatriation.

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