

# Career Prospects for Human Resource Management Professionals in Portugal

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## Abstract

The research conducted aimed to analyze the attitudes of human resource professionals towards managing their careers. The attitudes of protean and boundaryless careers were investigated, and the extent to which sociodemographic factors, such as salary, gender and academic degree, influence these attitudes. A total of 732 human resources professionals working as employees in private companies in Portugal participated in the study. The methodology involved a non-probabilistic convenience sampling approach, with a detailed survey covering dimensions like self-managed career attitudes, values-driven career attitudes, boundaryless career attitudes and mobility facilitating career attitudes. The results show that most professionals have protean and boundaryless career attitudes. Other research findings show that: (1) those with higher salaries have higher levels of protean and boundaryless career attitudes; (2) male professionals and (3) those with higher education show a higher prevalence of protean and boundaryless attitudes compared to female professionals and those with no higher education. This study sheds light on Portuguese HR professionals' career attitudes. The findings significantly contribute to our understanding of modern career concepts, suggesting avenues for future research.

*Keywords:* protean career; boundaryless career; career management; human resources management; human resources management professionals; Portugal.

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Changes in the labor market have led to changes in the way professionals manage their careers. With a decrease in full time employment opportunities in companies, an increase in temporary work, and the emergence of different forms of work, there is a growing interest in the self-management of professional careers. Workers are primarily responsible for managing and developing their own careers (Arthur, 1994; Hall, 2002). This phenomenon is set out in various theories, such as the theories relating to protean careers (Hall, 1976, 1996, 2002) and boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

The study attempts to address the question "To what extent do human resource professionals working as employees in private companies in Portugal display attitudes characteristic of the protean and boundaryless career models?". The central objectives of the present research were: (a) to identify to what extent human resource (HR) professionals in Portugal have protean and boundaryless career attitudes; (b) to what extent there is a positive correlation between these two types of attitudes towards career in this group of professionals; (c) to what extent socio-demographic factors have an influence on their protean and boundaryless career attitudes.

This study focuses on the analysis of HR professionals working as employees in private companies in Portugal. From a theoretical point of view, the research seeks to extend the study initiated in 2006 by Briscoe (Briscoe et al., 2006) which aimed to identify the relationship between the protean career models (introduced by Douglas Hall in 1976) and boundaryless careers (initially presented by Michael B. Arthur in 1994) (Arthur, 1994; Hall, 1976). From a practical point of view, the research sheds light on how sociodemographic variables can influence HR professionals' attitudes towards their careers.

The study provides both theoretical and practical contributions within the professional realm of Human Resources Management (HRM) in Portugal. Theoretically, it extends the research by Briscoe et al. (2006) on protean and boundaryless careers, serving as a foundation for future investigations across various professional domains. Moreover, it addresses a literature gap concerning career management among HR professionals in private Portuguese companies, filling a void evident in the existing literature. This study also contributes to profiling HR professionals working in private enterprises in Portugal, understanding their motivations for changing or staying in their current positions. Additionally, it has the potential to inform the development of initiatives aimed at talent retention within the HR profession in Portugal, an aspect hitherto unexplored in the literature.

## Literature Review

The literature review presents human resources professionals and human resources management, the protean career and boundaryless career models, as well as the relationship between these two models (Briscoe et al., 2006).

### *Human Resources Professionals and Human Resources Management*

HRM professionals play a crucial role in modern organizations and are responsible for a wide range of functions, including recruitment, selection, training, development, performance management and industrial relations (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). The evolution of HRM has been marked by a transition from an administrative focus to a more strategic role, where the HR is seen as a business partner, contributing to the formulation and implementation of organizational strategies (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

According to Dessler (2024), HRM is the process that involves acquiring, training, evaluating and compensating employees, as well as managing labor relations, employee health and safety, and promoting fairness in the workplace. HRM is fundamental to ensuring that organizations have the right talent, with the necessary skills, and that they are motivated and engaged to achieve organizational goals. Dessler (2024) also points out that HRM is essential for all managers for several reasons, namely to provide knowledge that helps avoid common HRM mistakes (such as inappropriate hiring, high turnover and legal problems related to discriminatory practices), to contribute to improving organizational performance and employee satisfaction (since managers with adequate training can motivate, evaluate and develop their teams more effectively) and to ensure that the organization's strategic objectives are aligned with the needs and capabilities of its human capital, especially in a context of global competitiveness and technological advances. This synergy between HRM and organizational strategies is fundamental to the long-term success of any organization (De Vos & Cambré, 2016).

The career management of HRM professionals can be analyzed from two perspectives: management by employers and management by the professionals themselves. It is essential for companies to manage the careers of these professionals to guarantee their own long-term continuity. However, there are associated risks due to the unpredictability of the career choices of the professionals themselves, who may choose to change companies for various reasons.

Companies play an important role in managing their employees' careers, offering opportunities for development and career progression. Professional development programs aligned with employees' interests, skills and competencies are some of the strategies used by companies to retain and develop employees, as well as to reduce employee turnover (Susanto et al., 2023). The literature suggests that implementing effective career management practices can increase job satisfaction and talent retention, as well as being associated with organizational performance (De Vos & Cambré, 2016). On the other hand, professionals themselves are increasingly proactive in self-managing their professional career so that it is more aligned with their skills and interests, so self-direction in career management is an increasingly evident attitude (De Vos & Cambré, 2016). Adopting protean career attitudes, where individuals manage their professional careers according to their personal values, has been associated with higher levels of satisfaction and career success (Hall, 2004).

### *Protean Career*

The term "protean career" was first introduced by Hall in 1976 in his book "Careers in Organizations" (Hall, 1976), where the author identified a new type of self-managed career. The main characteristic is the fact that the professional career is managed by the individual himself and integrates a set of experiences that have been acquired in various organizations. For Hall (2004), the protean career was constructed as the antithesis of the organizational career, distancing itself from the traditional approach, in that the individual: (a) starts to take responsibility for the development of his/her own career; (b) is guided by values such as freedom of career self-management and growth (knowledge, skills and attitudes developed intentionally throughout the career); (c) presents a high degree of mobility; (d) is guided by subjective success criteria, such as job

satisfaction and commitment to the job (intrinsic rewards), rather than only aspiring to rise up the hierarchy of the organization. Hall (1996) states that the 21st century career will be predominantly protean, driven by the professional him/herself and reinvented according to the changing person and environment, and not by the organization.

Briscoe and Hall (2006) indicate that the protean career is characterized by two dimensions: (a) it is self-managed (the professional controls and manages his/her career path, creating his/her own professional development opportunities) and (b) it is value-driven (the professional, in controlling and managing his/her career, takes into account and prioritizes his/her own personal values; these are intrinsic variables rather than external variables, such as salary, new professional opportunities or promotions).

To be successful in his/her protean career, Hall (2004) indicates that the professional must have two meta-competencies:

1. Self-knowledge (personal values guide career management and enable the professional to evaluate his or her success) and,
2. Adaptability (the professional's ability to adapt to the external environment).

The conjugation of the different possible combinations between the two mentioned meta-competencies gives rise to four career categories. Each category has a designation depending on the possession of higher or lower levels of self-knowledge and adaptability. Only one of these patterns is representative of the protean career. According to Hall (2004) these four categories are:

1. Reactive career - has high levels of adaptability competency and low levels of self-knowledge competency. In this career pattern, individuals have the necessary skills to adapt to changing contexts but are unable to behave proactively in the face of change because they don't have a high level of self-knowledge, so they do not take the initiative for change, but simply react to the context. They are described by Hall (2004) as individuals with chameleonic behavior;
2. Dependent career - low levels of adaptability competency and high levels of self-knowledge competency. These individuals tend to have a very acute sense of self, but do not perceive themselves as competent to deal with change, and therefore avoid making career decisions;
3. Rigid career: low levels of adaptability competency and of self-knowledge. Here, individuals do not have a clear self-awareness. They define their identity based on the work they do and do not perceive themselves as competent to deal with change, and are therefore very resistant to it;
4. Protean career: in this pattern, there are high levels of adaptability competence and self-knowledge, and individuals have an attitude of career self-management, managing their career proactively, with flexibility, independence and the awareness they need to achieve a successful professional career (Briscoe et al., 2006; Hall, 2004). It is in this career pattern that there is a need for each individual to be the actor in the construction of their own career path, with a view to obtaining their subjective success (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

Protean careers have been studied by several authors, including those who have evidenced that a protean career orientation is positively related to job satisfaction (Baruch, 2014; Baruch & Quick, 2007; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Herrmann et al., 2015). However, the protean career model has been subject to criticism, namely regarding the association of the protean career with a profile of successful professionals. This point was explored by Vardy and Kim (2007), mentioning that the individualized emphasis of the protean career characterizes professionals who always find work, as if it were a natural logic. However, professionals who have a protean orientation can also be unsuccessful. Notwithstanding this, according to Vardy and Kim (2007), the literature only highlights the profile of the professionally successful.

### ***Boundaryless Career***

In accordance with what was mentioned earlier, a concept that has gained prominence is the “Boundaryless Career”. This concept is similar to the concept of protean career and aims to highlight the continuous adaptation of professionals to organizational changes. Here we see a multifaceted phenomenon that transcends various boundaries and levels of analysis, physical and psychological, and objective and subjective (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Physical mobility is understood as the movement across boundaries in the organizations where the professional is. In turn, psychological mobility is understood as the perception the professional has about his or her own ability to achieve this physical mobility.

For these forms of mobility to occur, according to Sullivan and Arthur (2006), four assumptions are necessary:

1. That the professional is independent from the organization;
2. That there is an exchange relationship between the two agents (individual and organization);
3. That the professional has the opportunity to expand his or her network of contacts outside the organization;
4. That there is a change in the traditional perspective regarding the individual’s expectations of professional progression within the same organization.

According to Arthur and Rousseau (1996), the success of the boundaryless career is based on three competences:

1. Know-why, which refers to the values, identities and interests that give meaning to, and support the activities developed, i.e., the way individuals understand their own motivation, meaning and identification with their career;
2. Know-how, which consists of the set of skills and knowledge acquired throughout life to succeed beyond organizational boundaries in a logic of continuous learning; and
3. Know-whom, which is the set of networks of contacts that enhance career opportunities.

Sullivan and Arthur (2006) developed a typology of the boundaryless career, consisting of four distinct career patterns, according to the greater or lesser degree of physical and psychological mobility achieved along the individual’s career path. These four patterns of different combinations of mobility are characterized by four quadrants:

1. Low physical and psychological mobility: there is no crossing of boundaries in the organizations where the professional is, due to the awareness of the absence of this ability or the lack of awareness of this ability;
2. High physical mobility and low psychological mobility: there is a willingness to cross boundaries in the organizations where the professional is, but the professional wants this to be accompanied by similarity or continuity with the function performed where he/she is;
3. Low physical mobility and high psychological mobility: there is a perception of low capacity to achieve physical mobility, despite having the will to do so;
4. High physical and psychological mobility. Here individuals go through many physical changes (example: frequent job changes) and also change their psychological career orientation frequently.

Several authors have studied boundaryless careers, such as Wolff and Moser (2009), whose goal was to understand better the relationship between networks and career success, and the authors indicated that their findings may also be useful for career counseling and coaching. Some authors view the boundaryless career as positive, indicating that in work environments with uncertainty, these career attitudes help the individual to cope with uncertainty and to seek external support (Briscoe et al., 2012), including engaging in activities during unemployment (Waters et al., 2014a). Volmer and Spurk (2011) report that the boundaryless career is associated with objective career success (for example, annual salary and promotions). At the same time, the model of the boundaryless career has been criticized, particularly with regard to the loss of stability and financial security, causing negative consequences for the psychological health of the worker (Mirvis & Hall,

1994). It can also be considered a way to legitimize organizational restructuring and the reduction of career opportunities currently offered in the labor market (Cohen & Mallon, 1999).

### ***Relationship Between Protean and Boundaryless Career***

The concept of protean career, created and developed by Hall, was a theoretical concept without empirical evidence. To overcome this limitation, Briscoe et al. (2006) constructed a scale, with two subscales, to measure protean career attitudes. One subscale measures self-managed career management attitudes and the other measures career attitudes motivated by individual values. In addition, part of this study involved the construction of a scale to measure boundaryless career attitudes consisting, also, of two subscales. The first (psychological mobility) measures general attitudes towards working across organizational boundaries and the second (physical mobility) measures attitudes towards staying in single or multiple organizations (Oliveira et al., 2010).

Three studies were conducted by Briscoe et al. (2006). Their results show consistent positive correlations between protean and boundaryless career attitudes. By combining the aforementioned four categories of the protean model with the aforementioned four quadrants of the boundaryless career model, one can find 16 possible combinations of protean and boundaryless careers (theoretical career profiles). After analyzing these profiles, Briscoe et al. (2006) reduced these 16 theoretical profiles to eight profiles likely to be found in a work context today. These eight likely career profiles are more or less salient in four areas, the first two belonging to protean career and the remaining two to boundaryless career (broad sense):

1. Self-managed career;
2. Value-driven career;
3. Boundaryless career (psychological mobility);
4. Career facilitating mobility (physical mobility).

The relationship between protean career and boundaryless career has been the subject of studies by other authors. Among them are Drenzo et al. (2015). These authors hypothesize that individuals with protean and boundaryless career orientations have more adaptive behaviors. Second, they argue that protean and boundaryless career attitudes reflect a psychologically healthy response to uncertain career environments (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Waters et al., 2014b). In addition, they indicate that protean and boundaryless career attitudes are beneficial for career outcomes by helping individuals to cope better with their career experiences.

Greenhaus et al. (2008), O'Sullivan (2002) and Segers et al. (2008) treat protean and boundaryless career attitudes as synonymous, while others consider them as related but distinct, as in the case of Briscoe and Hall (2006), Inkson (2006) and Wiernik and Wille (2018). These authors refer to the existence of several studies that report positive results on the validity of protean and boundaryless career attitudes, to predict important career outcomes (Baruch, 2014). However, according to the authors, it is still unclear whether these attitudes have replicable and generalizable validity for satisfaction, mobility, extrinsic success, and other criteria of interest to individuals. In parallel, there are other authors who mention that protean and boundaryless career orientations may thrive in cultures where collectivism predominates (Segers et al., 2008), and there are authors who question the applicability of protean and boundaryless careers in Asian societies (Bernardo & Salanga, 2019), indicating that it is necessary to explore the validity of the concepts and measurements in different cultural and work contexts.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The study proposes three groups of research hypotheses. In the first group, the objective is to identify the extent to which HR professionals in Portugal have protean and boundaryless career attitudes. The hypotheses are:

- H1: There is a positive correlation between self-managed career attitudes and values-driven career attitudes among HRM professionals.
- H2: There is a positive correlation between boundaryless career attitudes and mobility facilitating career attitudes among HRM professionals.

In the second group, the objective is to identify the extent to which there is a positive correlation between protean and boundaryless career attitudes among HR professionals in Portugal. The hypothesis is, H3: There is a positive correlation between protean and boundaryless career attitudes among HRM professionals.

In the third group, the objective is to identify the extent to which the socio-demographic aspects of HR professionals in Portugal, working as employees, influence their attitudes towards protean and boundaryless careers. The hypotheses are as follows:

- H4: HRM professionals who have higher salaries show a prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes compared to those with lower salaries.
- H5: There is a prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes among male HRM professionals compared to females.
- H6: HRM professionals with higher education show a prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes compared to those without higher education.

These hypotheses aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the career attitudes of HR professionals in Portugal and how these attitudes are influenced by various factors. The findings of this study could have significant implications for HR practices and policies in Portugal. From a practical point of view, this study contributes to (a) identifying the profiles of HR professionals working as employees in private companies in Portugal; (b) characterizing these professionals by stratifying the sample, making it possible to verify (b.1) what motivates them to change companies, (b.2.) what motivates them not to change companies, and eventually contributing to (c) developing organizational initiatives to retain HR talent. Further research is needed to validate these hypotheses and explore their implications in more detail.

## Methods

### Research Techniques

For this research, quantitative research was carried out, using the questionnaire as a privileged research technique. Statistical analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between the studied variables. A questionnaire with 59 items was applied, which grouped three questionnaires, the first two created by Briscoe et al. (2006) and the third created by the authors with data on the sociodemographic characterization of the respondents.

The method used entails a questionnaire survey for data collection. It is composed of scales and dimensions that involve various aspects. The protean attitudes questionnaire includes the protean career attitudes scale developed by Briscoe and Hall (2006). This scale is divided into self-managed career attitudes with 8 items, including items such as “When development opportunities have not been offered by my company, I’ve sought them out on my own.” and “I am responsible for my success or failure in my career.” Also included are values-driven career attitudes with six items, including items such as “I navigate my own career, based on my personal priorities, as opposed to my employer’s priorities” and “It doesn’t matter much to me how other people evaluate the choices I make in my career.”

The boundaryless attitudes questionnaire includes the boundaryless career attitudes scale, also developed by Briscoe and Hall (2006). This scale is divided into boundaryless career attitudes (psychological mobility) with eight items, including items such as “I seek job assignments that allow me to learn something new” and “I would enjoy working on projects with people across many organizations”, It also included mobility facilitating career attitudes (physical mobility) with five items, including items such as “I like the predictability that comes with working continuously for the same organization.” and “In my ideal career I would work

for only one organization.” The questionnaire also includes the characterization of the HR professional/ sociometric data with nine items, including items such as “What is your age?” and “What is your current role in HR?”, as well as the characterization of the company where the HR professional works with 11 items, including items such as “What is your annual gross salary?” and “In your current job, do you have a permanent (indefinite) employment contract?” In total, the questionnaire consists of 59 items.

Considering the absence of adaptation for the Portuguese population of the Protean Attitudes Questionnaire and the Boundaryless Attitudes Questionnaire, these two measurement instruments were translated into the Portuguese language by a professional of Portuguese nationality, a university professor of English, at the School of Hospitality and Tourism of Estoril (researcher at the Center for Anglo-American Studies at the University of Lisbon, who holds a Ph.D. in English Literature and Culture).

The method used in choosing the sample was non-probabilistic by convenience. The sample for the study was composed of HR professionals working as employees in private companies in Portugal. Data collection for the research was conducted through a questionnaire survey, with Google Forms and LinkedIn serving as the primary channels for disseminating the study and distributing the questionnaire link. This approach aimed to gather responses from the targeted professional cohort. In the introduction of the Google Forms questionnaire, participants were informed that their participation would be voluntary and that the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses would be guaranteed. Furthermore, it was stated that the collected data would be used strictly within an academic context and for the purpose of scientific dissemination. The questionnaire survey was online, open to receiving responses from August 6 to September 6, 2020. There were 787 responses, of which 732 were valid. Only valid responses were considered for the sample analysis. The inclusion criterion for the validation of responses was applied whenever respondents answered affirmatively to the following item: “Do you work in the Human Resources field, as an employee, in a private company in Portugal?” The data analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel software.

In the study, a statistical treatment was employed, involving the use of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient to analyze the internal consistency of each of the subscales of the protean and boundaryless career attitudes scales; Pearson’s correlation was used to analyze the correlational relationships between the dimensions of the variables. This included subscales of protean and boundaryless career attitudes, as well as specific analyses for socio-demographic variables such as salary, gender and level of education. In addition, comparative analyses were also carried out based on the characterization of the HR professional, the sociometric data and the characterization of the company where the HR professional worked. This approach ensured a thorough exploration of the data and provided valuable insights into the career attitudes of HR professionals who are employed by private companies in Portugal.

### **Internal consistency**

The internal consistency of each of the subscales of the protean and boundaryless career attitudes scales was analyzed by Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The reliability of internal consistency, measured by Cronbach’s alpha, measures the correlation between the responses of a questionnaire by analyzing the answers given by the respondents, showing an average correlation between the items. In this study, almost all the results obtained were between .61 and .80 so that, according to Landis’ classification, the internal consistency is substantial. The exception was in the subscale of boundaryless attitudes, in which the result obtained was .87, so here the consistency is almost perfect (Landis & Koch, 1977).

## **Results**

### **Socio-demographic Characterization**

To have a better understanding of the sample studied, some socio-demographic data of the sample are presented. Regarding age and gender, the females predominate with 79.51% of the sample, compared to 20.49% of males. The predominant age group was 25 to 35 years old, representing 52.46% of the total sample,

followed by 36 to 50 years old, comprising 35.11%. The under-25 age group accounted for 8.47%, while the 51-65 age group covered 3.83%. Only 0.14% of the sample is made up of individuals aged over 65.

For academic training, 718 of the professionals in the sample have higher education (98.09%), with 50.68% of the respondents being undergraduate. Regarding the type of higher education, the most commonly recorded one is training in HRM (44.43%). For their current position, 52.05% are Human Resource Technicians (HRT), 24.59% are Human Resource Managers (HRM), 15.03% are Human Resource Directors (HRD), and 8.33% are Human Resource Administrators (HRA). Regarding the annual gross salary per function, the salary bands per function were as follows:

1. HRD: from €30,001 to €50,000 (36.36% of HRDs);
2. HRM: from €20,001 to €30,000 (33.33% of HRMs);
3. HRT: from €10,000 to €14,000 (33.07% of HRTs);
4. HRA: from €10,000 to €14,000 (44.26% of HRAs).

For the activity sector, most of the HR professionals work in the tertiary sector (80.46%). In addition, 40.85% work in national private companies and 40.44% in multinationals based abroad. It was also found that about 40.03% have between 1 to 5 years of experience in the HR area.

## Hypothesis Test

In relation to the research hypotheses, all of which focused on the analysis of HRM employees working as employees in private companies in Portugal, the following results were obtained.

### *Hypothesis 1*

There is a positive correlation between self-management career attitudes and value-driven career attitudes of HRM professionals. Calculating Pearson's correlation coefficient between the responses obtained, it was found that the coefficient is .996, so it is very strong. Thus, H1 is validated.

### *Hypothesis 2*

There is a positive correlation between boundaryless career attitudes and mobility facilitating career attitudes of HRM professionals. Pearson's correlation coefficient is .991, and H2 is validated.

### *Hypothesis 3*

There is a positive correlation between protean career attitudes and boundaryless career attitudes of HRM professionals. Pearson's coefficient is .968, so it is very strong, validating H3.

### *Hypothesis 4*

HRM professionals who have higher salaries have a prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes compared to those who have lower salaries. To test this hypothesis, we considered as higher salaries those with an annual value greater than €30,000. Analyzing the answers given to the options "4. Considerably" and "5. Very much", it was found that there were 573 (78.28%) HR professionals with salaries up to €30,000 and 159 (21.72%) with salaries over €30,000.

Grouping the responses to the questionnaires Protean Career Attitudes and Boundaryless Career Attitudes, we found that 69.83% of HR professionals with salaries over €30,000 responded to items 4 and 5, against 62.48% of HR professionals with salaries up to €30,000. Thus, this analysis also shows that HRM professionals with higher salaries have a prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes, globally considered, compared to those with lower salaries, so H4 is validated.



### **Hypothesis 5**

There is a prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes of male HRM professionals compared to female HRM professionals. To study this hypothesis, the highest response options “4. Considerably” and “5. Very much” were analyzed. After the analysis, it can be seen that the hypothesis posed is true in the protean attitudes questionnaire (men: 63.38%; women: 57.24%; difference in percentage points: 6.14), as well as in the boundaryless attitudes questionnaire (men: 73.44%; women: 69.22%; difference in percentage points: 4.22), and in the grouping of the two questionnaires (men: 68.22%; women: 63.01%; difference in percentage points: 5.21).

### **Hypothesis 6**

HRM professionals with higher education show prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes compared to those without higher education. To study this hypothesis, the highest response options “4. Considerably” and “5. Very much” in the questionnaires of protean and boundaryless attitudes (taken as a whole) were analyzed, as well as the sum obtained by combining the responses to these questionnaires. After the analysis, it was found that the hypothesis posed is true both in the questionnaire of protean attitudes (with higher education: 58.75%; without higher education: 45.41%; difference in percentage points: 13.35) and in the questionnaire of boundaryless attitudes (with higher education: 70.26%; without higher education: 60.99%; difference in percentage points: 9.27); in the pooling of the two scales (with higher education: 64.29%; without higher education: 52.91%) a difference was found in percentage points of 11.38.

## **Discussion**

With the results obtained in this research, it can be observed, in relation to H1, that the HRM professionals in the sample show a prevalence of self-managed career attitudes and of career attitudes motivated by their personal values, characteristics that make up the protean attitudes of professional careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Briscoe & Filkelstein, 2009). In this sense, they tend to take control of their own career path, creating their own professional development opportunities in line with their personal values, to the detriment of variables that are external to them, namely salary, new professional opportunities or promotions (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). The results obtained may mean that professionals want their careers not to be “hostage” to the company they work for. They prefer to have the freedom to choose the options that they consider most appropriate for their career and that these options are aligned with their own personal values, rather than choosing a professional context in which there is a dissonance between personal and organizational values. This situation may lead to possible conflicts, manifest or latent, with negative implications at both professional/personal and organizational levels.

As for H2, there was a positive correlation between boundaryless career attitudes (narrow sense: psychological mobility) and career attitudes facilitating mobility (physical mobility). Grouping the two subscales, the percentage is 70.08%, which leads to the conclusion that HR professionals in the sample tend to show a preponderance for the boundaryless career - broad sense, both in boundaryless career attitudes (psychological mobility), as well as in career attitudes facilitating mobility (physical mobility). Thus, these professionals tend to have both psychological and physical mobility, placing them in quadrant 4 (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). This quadrant states that professionals go through many physical changes (e.g., frequent job changes) and psychological career changes (intentions to achieve physical mobility). With the results obtained, it can be concluded that the professionals under study tend to have attitudes of professional movement, both psychologically and physically. These moves, if they are within a single company, are more likely to happen in large companies and multinationals. These are companies that, due to their size and structure, tend to provide greater possibilities for mobility.

However, in contributing to these mobility attitudes, the characteristics of the labor market in Portugal may also have an influence. Particularly noteworthy are the low salaries (mainly at the beginning of the professional career), the precariousness of employment contracts and the effects of the 2008 crisis, where

many professionals continue to expect, and are looking for jobs with the conditions they had before the crisis. The majority group aged 25 to 35 in 2020 was between 12 and 23 in 2008. For a better understanding, it is useful to outline the other age groups and their percentage representation. In 2020, those aged under 25 corresponded to individuals aged under 12 in 2008, representing 8.47% of the sample. The 36 to 50 age group in 2020 corresponded to people aged between 24 and 38 in 2008, representing 35.11% of the sample. Those aged between 51 and 65 in 2020 were aged between 43 and 57 in 2008, representing 3.83% of the sample. Finally, those aged over 65 in 2020 were aged between 51 and 65 in 2008. These data indicate that in 2008, 39.08% of the HR professionals studied were aged 24 or over, suggesting that a significant part of the current workforce experienced the difficulties of the 2008 crisis period. At the same time, even younger professionals, who in 2008 were not yet in the labor market and therefore did not directly experience the crisis, can shape their current compensation expectations based on the experiences and reports of previous generations. This may reflect an influence of the economic context on their attitudes towards their professional careers. This dynamic may intensify the search for working conditions like those that existed before the 2008 crisis, both on the part of professionals who were already in the labor market in 2008 and on the part of those who entered the labor market after 2008. This is also the issue of work overload, with working hours outside the normal working period, a situation that tends to get worse when this work is done clandestinely, i.e., imposed by the company (not recorded in the worker's individual file, nor taken into consideration for salary purposes). This situation is aggravated when a healthy balance between professional and personal life is compromised, implying a clear loss for the worker in contrast to a clear benefit for the company and a lack of compliance in the legal labor relationship existing between the company and the worker, which may lead to the emergence of burnout. Other possible reasons may be the possible lack of alignment between the boss, leadership, company ethos and organizational culture.

As for H3, we observed a positive correlation between the protean and the boundaryless career attitudes of HRM professionals. Grouping these two scales, the percentage of answers in options 4 and 5 was 64.08%, which leads to the conclusion that HRM professionals in the sample tend to show a preponderance for both types of careers, the protean and the boundaryless. Thus, of the eight likely career profiles today (Briscoe & Hall, 2006), HR professionals in the sample tend to be characterized by the career profile "Protean career architect", managing their careers through their personal values and with great physical and psychological mobility. These results may possibly be explained by the possibilities presented above.

Concerning H4 and aggregating the answers to protean and boundaryless career attitudes, it was found that 69.83% of HR professionals with salaries above €30,000 responded to items 4 and 5, against 62.48% of HR professionals with salaries up to €30,000, which leads to the conclusion that the career profile "Protean career architect" (Briscoe & Hall, 2006) tends to be related to higher salaries. As for the salary issue, this was the most referenced dimension in this study regarding the motivation to change companies, a dimension included in the discussion of results in H2.

Regarding H5, protean and boundaryless career attitudes show higher values in male HR professionals in all analyses (6.14 in the protean attitudes questionnaire, 4.22 in the boundaryless attitudes questionnaire and 5.21 when grouping the data from these two scales). This slight difference, regarding career attitudes facilitating mobility (physical mobility) may possibly be related to motherhood in the female gender.

Finally, considering H6, the study shows that HR professionals with higher education have a higher prevalence of protean and boundaryless attitudes, compared to those without higher education. This fact may possibly be associated with these professionals' greater ambition, desire for autonomy, and greater professional opportunities.

## Conclusion

The results of this study have important implications for understanding the protean and boundaryless career attitudes of HRM professionals working as employees in private companies in Portugal. The results obtained suggest that: (a) there is a positive correlation between their self-management career attitudes and their values-driven career attitudes; (b) there is a positive correlation between their boundaryless career attitudes (psychological mobility) and their mobility-facilitating career attitudes (physical mobility);

(c) there is a positive correlation between their protean career attitudes and their boundaryless career attitudes; (d) those with higher salaries show prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes compared to those with lower salaries; (e) there is a prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes of male HRM professionals compared to females; (f) those with higher education show prevalence of protean and boundaryless career attitudes compared to those without higher education.

This study has some limitations, including the fact that the data were obtained in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (which may have affected the perception of the respondents) and that the sample was a convenience sample, so the results cannot be generalized. However, despite the observed limitations, this study is relevant and aims to fill some gaps in research of this nature in the national literature. Thus, this research contributes to the acquisition of a deeper knowledge about the contemporary concepts of protean and boundaryless careers applied to HR professionals working as employees in private companies in Portugal.

For future research, we suggest (a) a more in-depth statistical analysis of each item that makes up the two attitude questionnaires, as well as (b) extending the present research to other professional classes in Portugal and making a comparative analysis of the results obtained. In parallel, we also suggest (c) replicating the present study to the same target professionals and making a comparative analysis of the results.

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