Advances in Career Theory and Research: A Critical Review and Agenda for Future Exploration

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Abstract

In this review the authors critically examine the nature of contemporary careers and the direction in which careers research has developed over the past decade. Specifically, career concepts that emerged in the 1990s, including the protean and boundaryless career frameworks, as well as the next generation of career concepts, including integrative frameworks, hybrid careers, and the kaleidoscope career model, are discussed. The authors examine conceptualizations and measures of these models as well as related research. This review aims to improve our understanding of careers in today’s dynamic work environment, provide a comprehensive discussion of current discourse, and offer major directions for future research.

Keywords
career, protean, boundaryless, postcorporate, kaleidoscope

Traditionally, careers were typically defined in terms of an individual’s relationship to an employing organization. These linear careers were described as taking place within the context of stable, organizational structures (e.g., Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957), with individuals progressing up the firm’s hierarchy seeking to obtain greater extrinsic rewards (Rosenbaum, 1979). These models, popularized during the 1950s and 1960s, were supported by economic and workplace environments characterized by the introduction and growth of new technologies as well as social norms and structures that tended to support the male-as-breadwinner family structure (Sullivan & Crocitto, 2007). The employer-employee relationship was characterized by an exchange of worker loyalty for the firm’s implicit promise of job security (Rousseau, 1989).

Environmental changes, such as increased globalization, rapid technological advancements, increased workforce diversity, and the expanding use of outsourcing and part-time and temporary employees, have altered traditional organizational structures, employer-employee relationships, and the work context, creating changes in how individuals enact their career. For example, The New York Times reported that recent mass layoffs have resulted in the rise of “forced entrepreneurship” (Richtel & Wortham, 2009). Many individuals are now creating

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work for themselves, using the Internet as an inexpensive tool to find business partners, market their products, and connect with suppliers (Carragher, 2005). Similarly, the credit crunch has forced some older workers to reconsider their career paths (Browning & Silver, 2008). Many of these older workers have been laid off or shifted around within their firms in response to changes in organizational strategies (Blenkinsopp, Baruch, & Winden, in press), while others have postponed their retirement plans or returned to the workforce after a period of retirement due to financial problems (Johnson, Soto, & Zedlewski, 2008; Wang, Adams, Beehr, & Shultz, 2009).

In addition to environmental changes, individuals are also changing their career attitudes and behaviors in response to many factors, including increasing life spans and hence work lives; changing family structures, including the increasing number of dual-career couples, single working parents, and employees with eldercare responsibilities; and the growing number of individuals seeking to fulfill needs for personal learning, development, and growth (Hall, 2004; Sullivan, in press). For example, some men and women are taking a hiatus from the workforce to become the primary caregiver for children or elderly relatives. These individuals are purposely using this time away from the workforce to increase their education or gain valuable skills through volunteer work in order to build their resume and ease their reentry into the workforce (Belkin, 2008).

Others are making dramatic career changes in response to individual reflection and reevaluation (Ibarra, 2003) as well as in response to changing needs at midlife (Power, 2009). Some have become more self-directed in their careers, self-initiating international careers (Tharenou, 2009) or choosing lateral, or even downward, job moves to fulfill personal needs (Hall, Gardner, & Baugh, 2008). Increasingly, individuals are driven more by their own desires than by organizational career management practices. Thus, while organizational leaders are struggling to identify positive strategies and practices to tackle the changing work environment and workforce (Feldman & Leana, 2000; Inkson & Baruch, 2008; Luthans & Youssef, 2007), individuals are adapting to a more transactional employer-employee relationship and taking more responsibility for their own career development and employability (Hall, 2004; Rousseau, 1989).

While in the past careers were usually defined in terms of the employer-employee relationship, contemporary scholars tend to define careers much more broadly (e.g., Arthur et al., 1989; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Baruch & Resenstein, 1992; Hall, 1996b, 2002). There is, however, no agreement among scholars on a common definition of career (see Greenhaus, Callanan, & DiRenzo, 2008). Based on our review of the literature, we define a career as an individual’s work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual’s life span. This definition recognizes both physical movements, such as between levels, jobs, employers, occupations, and industries, as well as the interpretation of the individual, including his or her perceptions of career events (e.g., viewing job loss as failure vs. as an opportunity for a new beginning), career alternatives (e.g., viewing limited vs. unlimited options), and outcomes (e.g., how one defines career success). Moreover, careers do not occur in a vacuum. An individual’s career is influenced by many contextual factors, such as national culture, the economy, and the political environment, as well as by personal factors, such as relationships with others (e.g., dual-career marriages).

Sullivan’s 1999 Journal of Management review of careers captured this transition from traditional, linear career paths to nonlinear, discontinuous career paths. Sullivan detailed the conceptual development of the boundaryless career model, which along with the protean career concept, influences much of today’s careers literature. She noted the paucity of empirical
research on nontraditional careers and called for the increased conceptualization of these constructs as well as the development of measures to better empirically test these ideas. She also noted that relatively little careers research had been completed in non–Western countries and little research had examined the careers of certain segments of the workforce (e.g., blue-collar workers, the disabled, minorities, the working poor). In the present review, we sought to determine whether the great technological, global, and social changes that have impacted the work environment and individuals’ careers have been accurately captured by the reconceptualizations of established constructs, the development of new models, and the research that has been completed since 1999.

To determine what changes had occurred in the literature, we conducted a systematic review using the keyword career in the Business Source Complete and PsycINFO databases. As we read the results of the database searches, we expanded our search by including materials referenced in these articles. While assembling and organizing the materials for this review of contemporary careers, it soon became clear that with the growth of publishing outlets and the increased availability of research from scholars around the globe, there were many concepts, studies, and directions for future research that page limitations would prevent us from fully exploring. Moreover, some of these topics, including work/family research (e.g., Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Cook, 2009; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000), gender and work (Powell & Graves, 2003), executive coaching (Feldman & Lankau, 2005), telecommuting (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), social capital (Van Wijk, Jansen, & Lyles, 2008), developmental networks (Molloy, 2006), global careers (Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007; Dickmann & Baruch, in press), and career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), had already been the subject of reviews. Thus, we chose to focus on the theories, concepts, and models of careers and the empirical research related to these ideas that have developed in the past decade and that we think will offer the most fruitful opportunities for research directions in the coming decades.

In sum, the purpose of this article is to provide a critical analysis of major career concepts and models as well as key studies that have been completed on these specific topics. We begin this examination by focusing on the protean and boundaryless career, two concepts that have had an important impact on theory development and research over the past decade. Criticisms of these concepts and advances in their reconceptualizations, measurement, and testing are discussed. Subsequently, we examine the next generation of career concepts, including integrative frameworks (e.g., career profiles, postcorporate careers), hybrid careers, and the kaleidoscope career model, and the related empirical research. (See Table 1 for a summary of the concepts and models of the past decade.) Based on this review and analysis, we propose an agenda for future research in the hope that this review encourages further reconceptualizations and model building as well as the increased study of contemporary, dynamic career processes.

The Protean Career Orientation

Although Hall first wrote about the idea of the protean career in 1976, it was not until the publication of his book, The Career Is Dead—Long Live the Career, in 1996 that the concept gained widespread popularity. Using the metaphor of the Greek god Proteus, who could change his shape at will, Hall described the protean careerist as able to repackage his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities to fit the changing work environment in order to remain marketable. Protean careerists are flexible, value freedom, believe in continuous learning, and seek intrinsic rewards
Table 1. Summary of Major Career Concepts, Models, and Ideas

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<th>Concept or model</th>
<th>Authors/date</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Protean career</td>
<td>Hall (1996b)</td>
<td>Based on the metaphor of the Greek god Proteus, who could change his shape at will, the protean careerist is able to rearrange and repackage his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the demands of a changing workplace as well as his or her need for self-fulfillment. The individual, not the organization, is in control of his or her career management and development.</td>
<td>Baruch (2008) developed a seven-item scale to measure the protean career. Sample items include “If I have to find a new job outside the organization, it would be easy” and “For me, career success means having high level of freedom and autonomy.” The scale uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Hall (1996b) offered no measure.</td>
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<td>Reconceptualized</td>
<td>Briscoe and Hall (2006)</td>
<td>Revised by defining two dimensions (values driven and self-directed career management) of the protean orientation.</td>
<td>Briscoe and Hall (2005) developed a 14-item assessment to measure the two dimensions of the protean career orientation. Sample items from the values driven scale include: “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.” Sample items from the self-directed career management scale include: “When developmental 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.” Both scales use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from to little or no extent (1) to to a great extent (5).</td>
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<td>boundaryless career</td>
<td>Arthur and Rousseau</td>
<td>Defined as career opportunities beyond the boundary of a single employer. An individual is independent rather than dependent on a traditional organizational career arrangement. Six different meanings of boundaryless careers were offered.</td>
<td>Arthur and Rousseau (1996) offered no measure.</td>
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| Boundaryless career    | Sullivan and Arthur      | Revised by defining varying levels of physical and psychological career mobility between successive employment situations.                                                                                   | Briscoe and Hall (2005) developed a 13-item scale to measure the two dimensions of the boundaryless career. Sample items from the boundaryless mindset scale include “I seek (continued)
Table 1. (continued)

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<td>No distinction between protean and boundaryless career concepts</td>
<td>Granrose and Baccili (2006)</td>
<td>Illustrated by a 2 × 2 model with physical movement along the horizontal continuum and psychological movement along the vertical continuum, suggesting the concept be viewed and measured by the degree of boundarylessness displayed by the career actor.</td>
<td>Job assignments that allow me to learn something new” and “I would enjoy working on projects with people across many organizations.” Sample items from the organizational mobility preferences scale include “I prefer to stay in a company I am familiar with rather than look for employment elsewhere” and “I would feel very lost if I couldn’t work for my current organization” (both items are reverse scored). Both scales use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from to little or no extent (1) to to a great extent (5). Sullivan and Arthur (2006) offered no measure.</td>
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<td>Postcorporate career</td>
<td>Peiperl and Baruch (1997)</td>
<td>Refers to careers that take place outside large organizations, whereby individuals enact a multitude of alternative career options, including employment with smaller, more agile firms; self-employment; working in small</td>
<td>The authors state that no set of items exists to measure this concept at the individual level because of the fluid nature of the phenomenon and that it is not a specific career attitude but rather that it relates to a wider industrial and societal level.</td>
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<td>Boundless perspective on careers</td>
<td>Greenhaus, Callanan, and DiRenzo (2008)</td>
<td>The three components of a boundaryless perspective are: (a) multidirectional mobility patterns, (b) career competencies, and (c) protean orientation. Economic factors, organizational conditions, and personal and family characteristics are antecedents of the boundaryless perspective. Both positive and negative individual and organizational outcomes are possible.</td>
<td>While Greenhaus and associates offer no measures of the boundaryless perspective, the protean orientation, for example, could be measured by Briscoe and Hall's (2006) scales of self-directed career management and values driven attitudes.</td>
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<td>Career profiles</td>
<td>Briscoe and Hall (2006)</td>
<td>The combination of the two dimensions of boundaryless career (psychological and physical mobility) along with the two dimensions of protean career (values driven and self-directed career management attitudes) yields 16 potential career profiles.</td>
<td>Profiles determined by use of the values driven attitude, self-directed career management attitude, boundaryless mindset, and organizational mobility preference scales (Briscoe &amp; Hall, 2005).</td>
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<td>Traditional career redux</td>
<td>Originally detailed by scholars such as Super (1957)</td>
<td>Originally characterized by linear, upward progression across one or two firms with a focus on extrinsic rewards and organizational career management. Today's traditional careerists typically exhibit more mobility between organizations.</td>
<td>Age, tenure in workforce, or organizational tenure often used as a proxy for career stage. Psychological measures of career stages, such as Super's copyrighted career concerns inventory or career scenarios describing different career stages, also have been used.</td>
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<td>Hybrid careers</td>
<td>Emergent concept not specifically associated with any one scholar</td>
<td>Careers that contain aspects of both the traditional and protean or boundaryless career concepts.</td>
<td>Scales used to measure traditional, protean, and boundaryless career concepts could be employed to measure hybrid careers.</td>
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<td>Kaleidoscope career model (KCM)</td>
<td>Mainiero and Sullivan (2005)</td>
<td>Using the metaphor of a kaleidoscope, the KCM describes how individuals focus on three career parameters when making decisions, thus creating the kaleidoscope pattern of their career. These parameters are: (a) authenticity, defined as being true to oneself; (b) balance, defined as the equilibrium between work and nonwork demands; and (c) challenge, defined as stimulating work and career advancement.</td>
<td>Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, and Mainiero (2009) developed a 15-item measure to assess the three parameters of the KCM. Sample items to measure authenticity include “I hope to find a greater purpose to my life that suits who I am” and “I want to have an impact and leave my signature on what I accomplish in life.” Sample items to measure balance include “I constantly arrange my work around my family needs” and “My work is meaningless if I can’t take the time to be with my family.” Sample items to measure challenge include “I continually look for new challenges in everything I do” and “I view setbacks not as ‘problems’ to be overcome but as ‘challenges’ that require solutions.” A 5-point response scale ranging from this does not describe me at all (1) to this describes me very well (5) is used. Sullivan and associates’ (2009) measure was based on an earlier instrument developed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005, 2006).</td>
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from work (Hall, 1996a, 1996b). Recognizing the decreased stability and increased uncertainty in the work environment as well as changes in employment relationships, including reduced job security, protean careerists have taken responsibility for managing their own career (Hall, 2002; Hall & Moss, 1998; Mirvis & Hall, 1996).

Briscoe and Hall (2006: 8) elucidated the protean career concept by defining its two dimensions:

(1) values driven in the sense that the person’s internal values provide the guidance and measure of success for the individual’s career; and (2) self-directed in personal career management—having the ability to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands.

Based on different combinations of these two dimensions, they suggested four primary career categories: dependent (low values driven, low self-direction), rigid (high values driven, low self-direction), reactive (low values driven, high self-direction), and protean or transformational (high values driven, high self-direction). To empirically examine this clarification and the four primary career categories, Hall and his colleagues developed (Briscoe & Hall, 2005) and validated (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006) a 14-item scale to measure the protean career orientation.1

Research on the protean career orientation has supported most of the basic tenets of the concept (e.g., Sargent & Domberger, 2007). For instance, Briscoe et al. (2006), using multiple samples of undergraduate and MBA students (total \( n = 493 \)), found protean attitudes were positively correlated with proactive personality, career authenticity (e.g., feeling true to oneself in one’s career role), openness to experience, and mastery goal orientation (e.g., emphasizing learning and embracing challenge). There was no significant relationship between the self-directed dimension and job changes, but there was a significant negative relationship between the values driven dimension and job changes, suggesting individuals may have a more protean career orientation without exhibiting high physical mobility. Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009), testing the assumption that protean careerists will be less committed to their employing organization, found that self-directed career management and values driven attitudes have no significant relationship to affective, continuance, or normative commitment.

Research has also examined whether there are gender differences in the protean career orientation. While some studies (Agarwala, 2008; Briscoe et al., 2006; Vigoda-Gadot & Grimland, 2008) have found no gender differences in protean orientations, others have found some differences (Ng, Burke, & Fiksenbaum, 2008). For instance, Segers, Inceoglu, Vloederghs, Bartram, and Henderickx (2008) reported no gender differences in self-directedness, but did find that women scored higher on the values driven dimension than men.

Relatively little research has been conducted on the protean career orientation and cultural differences (Agarwala, 2008; Baruch & Altman, 2008). In a fascinating example of multinational research, Segers et al. (2008) reported that individuals living in low masculine cultures (e.g., higher focus on relationships and quality of life over extrinsic rewards and competition) were more values driven. They also found that those in low power distance cultures were more self-directed in their own personal career management. Because individuals living in low power distance cultures are typically expected to find their own path and are less influenced by authority, these individuals are more likely prefer to control their own career management rather than rely on their employers’ career management systems. The findings of Segers and associates’
study illustrate the importance of considering contextual factors, like culture, when studying career orientations.

Likewise, relatively little research has examined the potential negative aspects that may be associated with protean and other nontraditional careers (see Vardi & Kim, 2007, for an exception). Writing on the protean career has tended to emphasize the “winners” in today’s changing workplace (Baruch & Quick, 2007; Hall, 1996a), such as individuals who find their true calling (i.e., the work they are destined to do; Hall & Chandler, 2005) or form a new working identity (Ibarra, 2003). Few studies have focused on those who have not found success in this nontraditional, global, technology-driven working environment (Baruch, 2004a).

Instead of enjoying increased job success and satisfaction, some workers have found themselves lost, shaken by the changing rules of the workplace, and unable to regain their footing (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997; Power, 2006). Expecting to enact a more traditional career, individuals may be reluctant to embrace new career attitudes and behaviors (Baruch, 2004a) or may be cynical about organizations in general (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1998; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000). Instead of technology reducing work/family conflict, the use of technology may have increased an individual’s stress as the boundaries between work and nonwork become more blurred. People may feel like they are always “on call,” even during vacations, holidays, and weekends (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

Individuals may not possess the necessary transferable knowledge to be hired by different employers or may be unable to swiftly grasp the essentials of their new work setting (e.g., organizational culture, norms) in order to effectively perform (Blenkinsopp & Zdunczyk, 2005; van Emmerik & Euwema, 2007). It may be difficult for individuals to allocate sufficient time and energy to cope with the demands imposed by increased learning or increased mobility (Sommerlund & Bautaiba, 2007). For example, Mallon and Walton’s (2005) exploratory investigation of the development of individuals both in and outside of organizations found that less learning was occurring than expected and certainly less than is anticipated in nontraditional career models. The professionals studied agreed in principle that workers are responsible for their own career management; they intended to engage in learning activities, but were unsure of how to accomplish such learning. Furthermore, those inside of organizations were passive about their own career development, while those outside of organizations reported they lacked the time needed for such learning activities. Much additional research is needed on the potential negatives of protean and nontraditional careers.²

In sum, Hall has written extensively about the protean career for academic audiences as well as detailing the practical implications of the concept and how it can be applied to help managers and organizations navigate the changing context of the contemporary workplace (see e.g., Baruch & Hall, 2004; Hall & Moss, 1998; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007; O’Connell, McNeely, & Hall, 2008). It is clear that the protean concept has had a major impact on the careers field. We expect the concept will continue to greatly influence careers research, especially now that the major criticism of the concept, the lack of a protean career measure, has been addressed (Baruch, 2008; Briscoe et al., 2006; Briscoe & Hall, 2005). In the next section, we examine the boundaryless career concept.

The Boundaryless Career Concept

In response to the “boundaryless organization” theme of the 1993 Academy of Management conference, the term boundaryless career was coined to offer a new perspective on contemporary
careers (Arthur, 2008). The concept was subsequently popularized by Arthur and Rousseau’s (1996: 6) book, *The Boundaryless Career*, which offered the following definition of the term: “one of independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements” involving “opportunities that go beyond any single employer” (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996: 116). In addition, Arthur and Rousseau (1996) offered six different meanings, discussing boundaryless careers like: (a) the stereotypical Silicon Valley career, in which individuals move across the boundaries of separate employers; (b) those of academics or carpenters, that draw validation and marketability from outside the present employer; (c) those of real estate agents, sustained by external networks or information; (d) those that break traditional organizational assumptions about hierarchy and career advancement; (e) those in which the individual rejects existing career opportunities for personal or family reasons; and (f) those based on the interpretation of the career actor, who may perceive a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints.

Although initial research based on the boundaryless career concept tended to focus on physical movement, many of these studies failed to distinguish among different types of physical mobility and did not specify the cause (voluntary or involuntary), origin (company or self-directed), direction (up, down, lateral), and, if appropriate, duration of movement in and out of the workforce (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Ng et al. 2007). Distinguishing among different types of physical mobility is important because these differences may explain conflicting research findings. For instance, the literature on expatriate careers offers insights into differences in outcomes related to origin (company vs. self-initiated) of the transition (see Baruch & Altman, 2002, Bozionelos, 2009). Recent research has found that individuals who self-initiate an expatriate career transition tend to move to roles that pay less and are less challenging than their previous role. Similarly, when self-initiated expatriates return to their home country, that transition is usually to a position with less pay and challenge. In contrast, company expatriates tend to move to roles with more responsibility than their previous role. When the company expatriates return home, that transition is usually to a position at a comparable level of responsibility and salary (see Tharenou, 2009, for a review).

Most of the research on physical mobility continues to focus primarily on upward movement (Ng et al., 2007). Few studies have been conducted on the less prevalent types of mobility, such as downward movements, as well as why certain types of mobility occur more often than others, factors that may constrain mobility, and why individuals may choose not to engage in physical movement (Ng et al., 2007; Sargent, 2003). Relatively little research has been conducted on changes in psychological boundaries (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005), defined as “the capacity to move as seen through the mind of the career actor” (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006: 21). Research has probably focused on physical over psychological mobility for two major reasons. First, physical movement is easier to measure (e.g., count the number of job changes, count the number of national borders crossed) than psychological changes. Second, until recently, there was no measure of psychological mobility available to researchers (Briscoe et al., 2006).

Some scholars, however, have answered the repeated calls for more research on the boundaryless career concept (e.g., Baruch, 2004b, 2006; Sullivan, 1999) by studying the interplay between physical movement and psychological changes (e.g., Marler, Barringer, & Milkvich, 2002; Peiperl, Arthur, Goffee, & Morris, 2000; Valcour & Tolber, 2003). For example, Kirchmeyer (2002) reported that women experienced more career interruptions (i.e., physical mobility) due to family demands (i.e., rejecting career opportunities for personal or family reasons) than men; men’s career interruptions were more likely due to job loss. Similarly, Ibarra (2003) provided
detailed case studies of how individuals changed their identity by using trial and error and self-reflection, with some making often dramatic physical movements across the boundaries between occupations (e.g., from psychiatrist to Buddhist monk).

A growing number of studies on the boundaryless career have been conducted outside of the United States and United Kingdom (e.g., Bagladli, Solari, Usai, & Grandori, 2003; Dany, 2003; Power, 2007; Segers et al., 2008). Haunschild (2003) explored the interorganizational, contingency employment system in a German not-for-profit repertory theater. He described how the great mobility within the project-based theater system was reinforced by standardized basic qualifications and the ease of evaluating actors’ qualifications, social networks based on loyalty to the profession rather than a specific organization, and the segmentation of the workforce between ensemble employees with longer term contracts (i.e., 3 years) and freelancers contracted for single plays or seasonal engagements. He also detailed the impact of labor market characteristics on interorganizational mobility, as in the case when a theater manager moves to another theater. When the manager moves, typically about one-third of the actors in the ensemble move with him or her, one-third of the actors remain with the ensemble, and one-third don’t have their contracts renewed. Another example is Yamshita and Uenoyma’s (2006) study of two segments of employees within Japan’s hotel industries. One segment was composed of those who wished to develop organizational knowledge and become managers but were hindered by human resource policies that limited within-firm advancement. The other segment was composed of those who focused on transferable skills and moving across the boundaries of different hotels, thus building relatively little firm-specific knowledge and reducing the likelihood of advancement from within one firm.

The boundaryless career concept has also had an important impact on how scholars have reconceptualized some well-established career topics, including retirement (Wang et al., 2009), plateauing (Bown-Wilson & Parry, 2009), learning and development (Gentry, Griggs, Deal, & Mondore, 2009), work/nonwork conflict (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003, 2006), career renewal (Baruch & Quick, 2007; Power, 2009), and expatriate assignments (Mezias & Scandura, 2005; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Sanchez, 2000; Tharenou, 2009), in light of the increased permeability between boundaries. An excellent example of how the boundaryless career perspective influenced a reconsideration of a long-studied area can be readily seen in the evolution of mentoring research. Initially, mentoring was conceptualized as a one-on-one, intense relationship between an experienced employee (i.e., the mentor) and a newer, usually younger employee (i.e., the protégé) within the context of one organization (Kram, 1985; Levinson, 1978). Recognizing the increasing mobility of workers, especially among firms, as well as growing performance pressures, scholars suggested that a single mentor relationship was no longer sufficient to meet the increasing needs of many protégés (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005; Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Baugh & Sullivan, 2005; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Higgins, 2000, 2005b). In addition to dyadic, within-firm mentoring relationships, scholars began to study sequential and simultaneous multiple mentoring relationships that could occur across many boundaries (Baugh & Sullivan, 2009). In today’s more boundaryless career environment, individuals are seeking other forms of guidance and support from developmental relationships in addition to mentoring (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Molloy, 2006), including networking both in and outside their organization (Arthur, Claman, & Defillippi, 1995; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; McCallum & Forret, 2009; Wolff & Moser, 2009).

Although the boundaryless career concept has influenced thinking on many topics and is very popular, it is not without its critics (e.g., Pringle & Mallon, 2003). There are two major
criticisms of the concept that deserve further examination. First, scholars have called for the further clarification and conceptualization of the construct (Eby et al., 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2008; Inkson, 2006; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Sullivan, 1999). Second, questions have been raised about how to measure the concept (Briscoe et al., 2006; Sullivan, 1999). The next two sections examine how these criticisms have been addressed.

Clarification of the Concept

To clarify the concept, Sullivan and Arthur (2006) suggested that a boundaryless career be defined by varying levels of physical and psychological career passages between successive employment situations. They offered a 2 × 2 model with physical movement along the horizontal continuum and psychological movement along the vertical continuum. Thus, in contrast to some previous studies that characterized boundarylessness as an either/or proposition, this refinement recommends the concept be viewed and measured by the degree of boundarylessness displayed by the career actor, along both physical and psychological dimensions. Although Sullivan and Arthur recommended that both physical and psychological passages, as well as the interplay between them, should be recognized and measured, they offered no such measurement.

Sullivan and Arthur (2006) did, however, extend the concept by detailing a number of possible “boundaries” or obstacles to a boundaryless career (e.g., gender discrimination, cultural differences, individual competencies), further emphasizing that while boundaries in general have become permeable, the ease of passage between boundaries is not the same for all individuals. They suggested that in general, women would have higher psychological mobility, perhaps because they are more likely to have discontinuous careers and are better able to see multiple career paths than men. In contrast, men would have higher physical mobility because they face less job discrimination. Segers et al. (2008) provided empirical support for these proposed gender differences in mobility as well as for physical, but not psychological, mobility differences due to age (i.e., lower physical mobility with increased age).

Other scholars (Gunz, Peiperl, & Tzabbar, 2007) have also discussed potential obstacles to a boundaryless career, including learning how to work in new teams and with new coworkers each time an individual makes a career transition (van Emmerik & Euwema, 2007); the lack of sponsors who offer access to opportunities (Judge, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Bretz, 2004; Skilton & Bravo, 2008); perceptual boundaries, such as those that have been found to prevent women from engaging in entrepreneurship (Malach-Pines & Schwartz, 2007); and structural factors, such as economic, societal, and cultural factors as well as industry and firm staffing policies (Ng et al., 2007; Pang, 2003). For instance, Dany (2003) detailed how a number of factors, including the importance of academic qualifications in the French labor system, employees’ preference for high salaries and job security, and focus on vertical professional advancement, limit the occurrence of boundaryless careers among French workers. Likewise, Bagdadli and colleagues (2003) found that top managers in Italy encountered two major obstacles to a more boundaryless career: competency based (e.g., lack of industry knowledge) and relation-based (e.g., lack of professional networks with former coworkers and business partners).

Measurement Issues

Questions about how to measure the boundaryless career concept were addressed by Briscoe and Hall’s (2005) development of a 13-item scale of boundaryless career attitudes. The instrument is
composed of two subscales. One subscale measures the boundaryless mindset (8 items), or “one’s general attitude to working across organizational boundaries.” The other scale measures organizational mobility preferences (5 items), or “the strength of interest in remaining with a single (or multiple) employer(s)” (see Table 1).

Based on the results of a multisample, three-study validation project, Briscoe et al. (2006) found no relationship between actual mobility and the boundaryless mindset (Study 3), suggesting that physical mobility should not be used as a proxy measure for boundaryless career attitudes. They also reported that the boundaryless mindset and mobility preferences were significantly and positively correlated with proactive personality, career authenticity, openness to experience, and mastery goal orientation. The validation and use of this measure by Briscoe and associates (2006) is a major advancement in the study of boundaryless careers because it offers researchers a consistent way to measure the concept so that findings across studies can be more easily compared and used to inform practice.

In sum, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in research on boundaryless careers (see e.g., Valcour, Bailyn, & Quijada, 2007) as well as research on how we may study many well-established career topics (e.g., mentoring; e.g., Lentz & Allen, 2009) within a boundaryless context. The boundaryless career concept offers a foundation for exploring how careers are evolving in today’s complex work environment. For instance, increased globalization has not only brought a flow of people, knowledge, information, ideas, and products across national borders, but it has also influenced how individuals perceive and enact their career (Tams & Arthur, 2007). For many individuals, enacting a global, boundaryless career reflects physically crossing national borders while simultaneously crossing cultural and psychological borders. For others, enacting a global career may require no physical crossing of national borders, but may instead require a psychological reorientation to how they perceive their career. These individuals may find themselves learning how to work more effectively using technology to connect with individuals from various nations and cultures as well as recognizing that they may be competing for jobs with workers from different parts of the globe.

While the boundaryless and protean concepts have dominated much of the research on careers over the past 10 years, the past decade has also witnessed the rise of the next generation of career concepts. These newer conceptualizations of careers are discussed in the next section and are summarized in Table 1.

The Next Generation of Career Concepts

A number of new concepts and models have recently been offered to explain the variety of career patterns that are being enacted in today’s dynamic work environment. Some of these newer conceptualizations, which we call “integrative frameworks,” represent attempts to combine various ideas from the protean and boundaryless concepts. Some of these newer concepts emerged based on the interpretations of research findings (e.g., hybrid careers). Other models (e.g., kaleidoscope) offer conceptualizations that are not an extension of either the protean or boundaryless concept, but instead offer an alternative lens by which careers can be examined.

Integrative Frameworks

Despite the research on the protean and boundaryless careers, there continues to be questions as to the relationship between the two concepts. Granrose and Baccili (2006), for example, did
not distinguish between protean and boundaryless careers. Instead, they suggested that the two concepts are a reflection of the new, more ambiguous employer-employee relationship. Greenhaus and associates (2008: 285) noted the lack of consensus in a definition of the boundaryless career, suggesting it is difficult to “determine where boundarylessness ends and protean begins.” While some argue that the two concepts are complementary (e.g., Inkson, 2006) or are distinct but overlapping (Briscoe & Hall, 2006), others have called for the integration of the protean orientation and the boundaryless career into a more comprehensive model of careers (e.g., Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). In response to this debate, three major integrative frameworks have been offered to clarify the relationship between the protean and boundaryless career concepts.

First, Peiperl and Baruch (1997) offered the postcorporate career concept as a means of integrating ideas from the protean and boundaryless concepts. They suggested that postcorporate careerists are self-directed, take responsibility for their own career management, perceive a variety of career options, and are willing to cross multiple boundaries to fulfill their needs for intrinsic job satisfaction as well as financial rewards. Postcorporate careerists tend to be those individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily leave large organizations to work in a variety of alternative employment arrangements, including working as independent contractors and temporary workers, or working for a small firm that provides professional services to large organizations. The idea of the postcorporate career has been applied in a number of research settings (Kelly, Brannick, Hulpke, Levine, & To, 2003; Mihail, 2008; Özbilgin & Healy, 2004).

Second, Greenhaus et al. (2008) offered the boundaryless perspective, which integrates the major themes of the boundaryless and protean career literatures. This framework has three major components. The first component is mobility patterns, which differs from the traditional career in that they are multidirectional (Baruch, 2004b; e.g., between firms, between employment forms, i.e., from full-time to part-time work). Greenhaus and associates noted that mobility patterns also include the rarely discussed idea of job crafting, defined as the actions taken by an individual to change and redefine his or her job. Job crafting can occur by physically changing the job (e.g., nature and number of tasks), psychologically changing the way the job is perceived, and/or changing whom one interacts with on the job. The second component is career competencies. Career competencies are manifested in people’s beliefs and identities (knowing why), knowledge and skills (knowing how), and network or relationships (knowing whom; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). The third component is the protean orientation (e.g., self-directed career management and values driven attitudes; Briscoe & Hall, 2006). This framework also delineates the antecedents (e.g., economic factors, organizational conditions, personal characteristics) and possible individual and organizational outcomes of the boundaryless perspective.

Third, Briscoe and Hall (2006) combined elements of the protean orientation with the boundaryless career to produce 16 different career profiles. Each profile is based on the two protean dimensions (self-directed career management and values driven attitudes) and two boundaryless career dimensions (psychological and physical mobility), and each profile is described as being high or low in each of these four dimensions. For example, Briscoe and Hall defined the solid citizen profile as having low physical mobility but high psychological mobility as well as high self-directed career management and values driven attitudes. In contrast, the fortress profile is defined as having a high values driven attitude but low self-directed career management as well as low physical and psychological mobility.

To empirically test these 16 combinations, Segers et al. (2008) examined the career profiles of 13,000 individuals from nine European countries. They identified 3 of the 16 profiles proposed by Briscoe and Hall (2006) as well as 1 profile, the curious/wanderer, which combined
aspects from 2 of the profiles. Segers and associates found that 30% of the respondents were protean career architects (i.e., they are values driven, self-directed in their career management, and psychologically and physically mobile); 22% were trapped/lost (i.e., they don’t emphasize inner values and don’t see possible alternative career options); 21% were hired gun/hired hand (i.e., they are physically mobile and adaptive but aren’t good at defining and acting upon their own values); and 27% were curious/wanderer (i.e., they are physically and psychologically mobile but not values driven or self-directed). Interestingly, Segers et al. found contextual factors influenced the presence of these career profiles. Specifically, the protean career architect profile was overrepresented in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, while the hired gun/hired hand was underrepresented in both. Italy had a higher proportion of individuals with hired gun/hired hand profiles, whereas Belgium had a higher proportion with the curious/wanderer profile. Likewise, the protean career architect profile was more likely to be found in the industrial sectors of health and social work, counseling, science and research, marketing, and government. The hired gun/hired hand profile was found predominantly in sales. The curious/wanderer profile was more likely to be found in the education, health, and sales sectors. The trapped/lost profile was evident in industries including construction, manufacturing, transportation and logistic, and Internet/new technologies.

**Traditional Careers Redux**

For many years, scholars emphasized careers within the confines of traditional organizational structures. Beginning in the mid-1990s, an increasing focus was placed on careers outside of organizations. Career scholars, however, may be guilty of shifting from one extreme to another. Numerous studies have reported that individuals in their samples exhibited a more traditional career path (e.g., Cabrera, 2009; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; Sargent & Domberger, 2007; Smith-Ruig, 2009).

For example, P. McDonald, Brown, and Bradley (2005) found that while most employees, especially women, were following nontraditional career paths, some still had traditional careers (e.g., predictable organizational advancement). The individuals following traditional career paths had infrequent job or firm changes and most had worked for their organization for 10 or more years. The organization had some policies that supported a traditional career path, including mechanisms for rewarding long tenure (e.g., 3 months of paid leave after 10 years of continuous service). Likewise, O’Neil, Bilimoria, and Saatcioglu (2004) also found that while most of the women in their sample exhibited nontraditional career paths, 38% had externally directed careers with linear, ladder-like advancement patterns. Skilton and Bravo (2008) also found that while many individuals in the film industry had short tenures (i.e., 61% of the personal assistants left the industry in the 3-year study period), some individuals followed a more traditional career path from personal assistant directly to producer, with few roles in between. These individuals often remained with the same production company even when they were producers themselves and could have established their own firm.

**Hybrid Careers**

Emerging from the findings from several studies is the idea that some individuals enact “hybrid” careers that are characterized by elements of both traditional and nontraditional career concepts. For example, Granrose and Baccili (2006) found that most workers in their sample desired the
traditional career outcomes of job security and upward mobility but also wanted nontraditional outcomes such as “boundaryless training” (i.e., training that could be used both in and outside the firm) and “protean well-being” (i.e., an open, trusting, and respectful work atmosphere). O’Neil et al. (2004) found that 34% of the women in their sample had an orderly career and were focused on upward advancement, but were also self-directed in their career management. Moreover, Skilton and Bravo (2008) reported that some film industry employees followed an “up the ladder” path that had elements of both a traditional and nontraditional career. These individuals assumed multiple roles while advancing up the hierarchy, but also moved back and forth between projects in which they had different levels of control (e.g., some they produced, others they directed).

The Kaleidoscope Career Model

One of the next generation of career concepts, the kaleidoscope career model (KCM), was developed independently from the protean or boundaryless concepts. Instead, the KCM is based on the results of five different studies (interviews, focus groups, and three surveys) of more than 3,000 U.S. professional workers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Like a kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements, the KCM describes how individuals change the pattern of their career by rotating the varied aspects of their lives to arrange their relationships and roles in new ways. These changes may occur in response to internal changes, such as those due to maturation, or environmental changes, such as being laid off. Individuals evaluate the choices and options available to determine the best fit among work demands, constraints, and opportunities as well as relationships and personal values and interests. As one decision is made, it affects the outcome of the kaleidoscope career pattern.

Just as a kaleidoscope uses three mirrors to create infinite patterns, individuals focus on three career parameters when making decisions, thus creating the kaleidoscope pattern of their career. These parameters or motivators are: (a) authenticity, in which the individual makes choices that permit him or her to be true to himself or herself; (b) balance, whereby the individual strives to reach an equilibrium between work and nonwork (e.g., family, friends, elderly relatives, personal interests) demands; and (c) challenge, which is an individual’s need for stimulating work (e.g., responsibility, autonomy) as well as career advancement. These three parameters are simultaneously active over the life span, with the strength of a parameter to shape a career decision or transition dependent on what is going on in that individual’s life at that particular time. Over the course of the life span, as a person searches for the best fit that matches the character and context of his or her life, the kaleidoscope’s parameters shift in response, with one parameter moving to the foreground and intensifying as that parameter takes priority at that time. The other two parameters lessen in intensity and recede to the background, but are still present and active, as all aspects are necessary to create the current pattern of an individual’s life/career.

Research has supported the basic tenets of the KCM (Godshalk, Noble, & Line, 2007; Smith-Ruig, 2009). For example, Cabrera’s (2007) study of 497 professional women found evidence of the existence of the three career parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge. She found that these three parameters did indeed influence career decision making. Also, as suggested by the KCM, 62% of her sample reported that their career focus changed over time. Research on the KCM has found gender differences in career enactment. Sullivan and Mainiero
(2007a, b) found most men (84%) followed an alpha kaleidoscope career path (focus on challenge from early to midcareer, then authenticity, and then balance later in the career) while most women (83%) followed a beta pattern (challenge early in the career, then balance, and finally authenticity). There were, however, some men who exhibited a beta career pattern. The men following a beta pattern tended to be younger and expressed a desire for greater work-life balance. Cabrera (2009) also found support for the beta career pattern among women based on in-depth interviews with 25 participants.

In addition to gender differences, research has noted generational differences in the need for authenticity, balance, and challenge. For instance, Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, and Mainiero (2009) found that members of Generation X (born 1965-1983) had significantly higher needs for authenticity and balance than Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), with no significant difference in the need for challenge between the two generations. The KCM has also been used to help explain the careers of women entrepreneurs in Japan (Futagami & Helms, 2009) and the work-life integration experiences of midcareer professionals in Ireland (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). The KCM has been applied to a number of different topics, including human resource development programs, work stress, family-friendly organizational programs, and career counseling (Sullivan, in press; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007a, 2007b, 2008).

In sum, the KCM highlights the importance of potential gender differences in career paths, suggesting that other nontraditional models should consider whether men and women enact careers differently (e.g., Segers et al., 2008). Like the protean and boundaryless concepts, the KCM also highlights the importance of relationships on career decision making as well as the effect of contextual factors on careers (Sullivan, in press). As scholars have investigated the potential linkages between the protean and boundaryless careers (Briscoe et al., 2006; Segers et al., 2008), future research may also find such linkages between the protean and boundaryless concepts and aspects of the KCM. Much more research is needed, however, to test this model. Recent refinements to a measure of the three parameters of the KCM (Sullivan et al., 2009), however, should help to increase the research being conducted on this model (Table 1).

In this review, we have examined the continued evolution of two predominant career concepts, the protean career orientation and the boundaryless career, which have had an important and lasting impact on the careers literature. We have discussed the next generation of career conceptualizations, including the integration of the protean and boundaryless concepts as well as hybrid careers and the KCM. Table 1 provides a summary of these major concepts, frameworks, and ideas.

These newer conceptualizations suggest many intriguing avenues for further study. Based on this review and critical analysis, in the next section of this article, we set an agenda for future research on careers.

**Agenda for Future Research**

Our review indicates that scholars have made great strides in better understanding nontraditional, nonlinear career concepts since the publication of Sullivan’s (1999) review. Particularly notable is the introduction of measures (e.g., Baruch, 2008; Briscoe et al., 2006; Sullivan et al., 2009) so that the protean, boundaryless, and kaleidoscope career concepts can be subject to even greater empirical examination. In addition to the development of measures of these concepts, we also note the increase in career research in a number of areas that Sullivan recommended. There has been clarification and further conceptualization of the protean orientation
and the boundaryless career and greater attention paid to gender differences in careers. There has also been an increased recognition of the influence of contextual factors on careers, including the effect of cultural and national differences on career enactment.

Although there has been increased research in a number of areas as recommended by Sullivan (1999), our current review of the literature suggests additional areas for future research. First, the further development of the protean career concept as well as the creation and validation of related measurement scales should better enable scholars to empirically examine some unresolved and underexplored issues. For instance, there are conflicting results as to whether there are gender differences in the protean career orientation (e.g., Agarwala, 2008; Ng et al., 2008) and little research has been completed on potential cultural or national differences in protean orientations (Segers et al., 2008). Not only can more empirical studies be completed, but the adoption of common measurement scales should facilitate the use of meta-analysis techniques in future reviews of the protean career literature.

Second, there is still concern that the writings and research on the protean, boundaryless, and other nontraditional career concepts have tended to emphasize the positive aspects with little mention of potential negative outcomes (Currie, Tempest, & Starkey, 2006; Sullivan, 1999; Van Buren, 2003; Vardi & Kim, 2007). Continued research on the potential negatives of newer career forms is needed at the individual, organizational, and national levels of analysis. At the individual level, personality traits, for example, may be an obstacle to an individual’s ability to reenvision career options or may influence a successful transition from a traditional, linear career to a nontraditional career orientation. For example, Eby, Butts, and Lockwood (2003) reported that individuals who are proactive, flexible, open to new experiences, and acknowledge personal strengths and weaknesses tend to manage better in today’s workplace than those who do not possess these personal characteristics. Similarly, Forret and Dougherty (2001) found that individuals who were higher in extraversion and self-esteem were more likely to engage in networking behaviors, which should help them better navigate nontraditional careers.

Although some individuals may find themselves outside of the permanent, full-time workforce through job loss, others may proactively choose to engage in alternative, short-term job assignments or project work. In either case, individuals may move more freely across many organizational boundaries, but may also find themselves stigmatized by the temporary worker label (Boyce, Ryan, Imus, & Morgeson, 2007). These temporary and project workers may be more likely to experience negative work outcomes such as sexual harassment and discrimination (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006; Sullivan, 1999) or abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007; Wu & Hu, 2009). Organizations may not consider it worth the time and money to investigate complaints from workers who will be employed by the firm for a relatively short time period. Temporary and project workers, fearful that filing a complaint will earn them a negative reputation, may fail to report problems that may not only impact their current level of performance, but may also influence their long-term employability.

At the organizational level, the shift from the long-term–based employer-employee relationships into more transactional, short-term–based employer-employee relationships (e.g., Rousseau, 1989) can create increased ambiguity and uncertainty for managers and those designing and implementing human resource management polices (Baruch, 2004a, 2004b). Under the more traditional, long-term–based relationship, the vast majority of recruitment, socialization, and training processes were focused on the lower ranks, with employees rising through the hierarchy due to internal opportunities and a combination of talent and tenure. Under the newer, more transactional employer-employee relationship, employees enter and leave organizations...
at different career stages and different levels within the organization, making the recruitment, socialization, training, succession planning, and other processes more varied and complex (Baruch, 2004a, 2004b). In addition, increased globalization makes the development and implementation of policies more complicated, especially in the case of multinational firms with workforces located in different countries throughout the world (Becker & Haunschild, 2007; Dickmann & Baruch, in press).

As boundaries between countries become more permeable, laws regarding employment relationships, including discrimination and business conduct (e.g., what is and is not bribery), may become increasingly difficult to apply and enforce (see the special issue of Human Resource Management edited by Baruch, Altman, & Adler, 2009, for a more detailed discussion). Technology has increased the permeability of country borders, but many organizations lack sufficient knowledge to effectively manage workers from different cultures who may have widely different career needs and may be motivated by many different career factors (e.g., Segers et al., 2008). While a number of articles have offered suggestions to organizations on how to manage expatriation and repatriation (Baruch & Altman, 2008; Baruch, Steele, & Quantrill, 2002; Benson & Pattie, 2008; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Doherty & Dickmann, 2009), relatively little research has offered suggestions on how to help employees from different locations across various country borders effectively work with each other via technology.

At the national level, the shift from long-term–based to short-term–based employment relationships impacts educational processes, labor market systems, and government policies and programs (Baruch, 2004a, 2004b). For example, universities that prepared their students for lifetime linear employment within one or two firms need to consider strategies to prepare students for alternative, multidirectional career paths. Vested pension systems and similar programs may need to be reevaluated and changed to more transferable and fluid systems. As organizations outsource work across country boundaries, the reduction of within-country job opportunities may decrease the power of organized labor and influence trade agreements and safety standards between countries. Politicians and government leaders may find themselves under increasing pressure to enact laws to protect the jobs and products of their constituents.

New technologies that have eliminated the need for some jobs and professions may increase budgetary pressures on government social programs, including efforts to retrain displaced workers. While technology has aided in the increased globalization of the workforce and the increased creation of new virtual careers (e.g., Internet reporters, Web designers, virtual coaches), the opportunities for the misuse of technology have increased. As has been the case with Internet (e.g., legalities of employers monitoring employees’ e-mail and computer files), Web-based businesses (e.g., exploitation of children by adult pornography sites), and cyber crime (Benjamin, Gladman, & Rundell, 1998; Chen, Chung, Xu, Wang, Qin, & Chau, 2004), governments may need to increasingly intervene and enforce penalties for the misuse of technological advances. In sum, greater research into the potential negative aspects associated with nontraditional careers at the individual, organizational, and national levels is needed.

Third, the further clarification of the boundaryless career concept (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) and the introduction of the boundaryless mindset and the organizational mobility preference scales (Briscoe et al., 2006) should encourage greater study of underresearched topics, including the potential gender and country differences in the enactment of a boundaryless career. Some studies, for example, have indicated the importance of national culture on boundaryless careers, suggesting that certain economic and cultural elements may act as boundaries or obstacles to the
boundaryless career and may instead reinforce more traditional career models (Bagdadi et al., 2003; Dany, 2003). Additional research on potential obstacles to a boundaryless career is needed.

Furthermore, the recent reconceptualization of the boundaryless career concept (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) as encompassing both physical and psychological mobility opens new avenues of research, while also suggesting the greater need for the clarification of what exactly is being measured and studied. In terms of physical mobility, scholars need to identify the specific type of mobility being examined by specifying direction (e.g., up, down, lateral), cause (i.e., voluntary or involuntary), origin (i.e., self or company initiated), and whether multiple boundaries are being crossed during the same transition (e.g., firm, occupation, country). Obstacles to physical mobility (e.g., geographical immobility due to being a member of a dual-career couple or elder-care responsibilities) as well as the influence of individual (e.g., personality, values, past positive and negative mobility experiences) and structural (economic, societal, industry, and organizational) factors on mobility decisions need to also be considered (Ng et al., 2007). Past research has found that some women (Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) and older workers (Wang et al., 2009) move in and out of the workforce numerous times over their careers. Career patterns characterized by voluntary and involuntary multiple movements cycling in and out of the workforce are worthy of further examination. At the level of the organization, the effect of increased mobility on the transference of organizational culture and knowledge from one firm to another (see Higgins, 2005a) as well as the loss of organizational memory when employees retire or otherwise leave their organizations warrants additional study.

In terms of psychological mobility, more research attention needs to be paid to how individuals may change psychological perspectives and attitudes about a work situation. Such psychological changes are clearly more difficult to study than physical transitions. Whereas actual physical passages between jobs and organizations can be readily identified and enumerated, changes in how an individual perceives his or her career would ideally involve longitudinal research with data collected at multiple intervals. Relatively little research attention has been devoted to psychological mobility, especially when individuals’ career perceptions are altered but no associated physical movement has occurred. There are numerous situations, such as periods of personal crisis (e.g., heart attack, loss of loved one) or assuming primary care for a child or elderly relative, in which perceptions of a boundaryless future and alternative career options may be impacted. For instance, while an individual who has a heart attack may return to the same job at the same firm, that individual’s job perceptions and career aspirations as well as his or her relationship with work associates and number of hours devoted to work may dramatically change. In addition to the use of recent measurement advances, career scholars may benefit from applying models and theories from related fields (e.g., Salancik & Pfeffer’s [1978] social information perspective) to better understand the processes underlying psychological mobility. Changes in physical and psychological mobility, however, should not be studied independently of each other. We join Arthur and associates (2005) in recommending that additional research be completed on the complex interplay between physical and psychological passages.

Fourth, despite the popularity of the protean and boundaryless career concepts, it is important that scholars recognize that the traditional linear career is still being enacted by some workers and is more prevalent in some organizations, industries, and countries than in others. Because studies have found many different types of careers, including traditional, hybrid, and kaleidoscope careers, we recommend that scholars first identify the career orientation of the individual being studied and then consider the individual’s attitudes and behaviors within that career context. Just as past research tended to assume that individuals were enacting traditional
careers, scholars should take care not to assume that all study participants are enacting similar, nontraditional career patterns. Along the same line of thought, the further study of how organizational policies and firm culture influence career paths should not be overlooked (P. McDonald et al., 2005). Some firms, for example, may encourage more traditional career attitudes, behaviors, and expectations through such policies as reliance on promotion from within and benefits associated with increased seniority or firm-specific training. The effectiveness of different organizational strategic human resource management decisions, policies, and programs on the attitudes and behaviors of employees enacting different types of careers (e.g., hybrid as compared to protean or more traditional career) should be investigated.

Fifth, several authors have offered conceptualizations that integrate the protean and boundaryless career concepts (e.g., Peiperl & Baruch, 1997) with the career profiles combination (Briscoe & Hall, 2006) already being tested by other scholars (Segers et al., 2008). These integrative models provide not only insights into how the protean and boundaryless concepts may be related or combined, but they also offer guidance on what contextual variables should be considered when conducting empirical studies of these ideas. For example, Segers and associates’ (2008) study illustrated the importance of gender, industry, culture, and nation, while Greenhaus et al.’s (2008) conceptual integration highlighted the effect of economic, personal, and family factors on careers. Potential integrations of the protean and boundaryless career concepts with newer career models (e.g., KCM) have yet to be tested.

Sixth, although the developers of the kaleidoscope career model have completed a number of studies on the model and have used relatively large sample sizes (e.g., Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006, n > 3,000; Sullivan et al., 2009, n = 908) as well as a variety of methods (e.g., surveys, interviews), further research from independent scholars must be completed. The KCM and related research suggests that there may be important gender as well as generational differences in career attitudes and behaviors that merit future research. The increased study of generational differences in career perspectives may be especially important given the declining number of members from the Greatest Generation (born prior to 1946) in the workforce and the growing number of the younger workers (born after 1965), who are much more technically savvy and may be motivated by different factors than previous generations of workers (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; K. S. McDonald & Hite, 2008).

Seventh, we repeat Sullivan’s (1999) call for greater research on potential differences in career enactment due cultural and national differences. Studies of workers in non–Western countries that recognize the economic and societal influences on careers are especially important because most of what we know about careers is based on studies conducted in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, making Western models the de facto “standard” against which careers in other countries are compared. In-depth analyses within understudied national contexts, such as Pang’s (2003) compelling analysis of first- and second-generation Chinese workers in Hong Kong and Great Britain, Zhao and Zhou’s (2008) examination of careers in Taiwan, and Khapova and Korotov’s (2007) study of career attitudes in Russia, should be continued. Although it may be difficult to gather data from multiple countries, especially from countries under strict government control (e.g., China), research that spans different nations provides much needed insights into the application of career theories and models developed in Western countries in non–Western contexts. Segers and associates’ (2008) use of a large database drawn from nine European countries as well as the organization of consortia of scholars who work together to study common variables across multiple countries (Malach-Pines, Ozbilgin,
& Burke, 2008) are two strategies that could be emulated to obtain samples across multiple nations.

**Conclusion**

To paraphrase a Chinese proverb, we live in interesting times, times in which established ideas about work and careers are continually being challenged. Traditional theories of careers (e.g., Super, 1957) were based on a system of clear, hierarchical organizational structures and a growing economy. The blurring of organizational, industry, and occupational boundaries; the escalation of technological developments; and rapid globalization have all contributed to a new work context, requiring fresh and innovative ways of examining careers. As predictability and stability diminished, scholars realized that long-held theories of the traditional, linear career no longer adequately explained the realities of many individuals and new, more dynamic concepts arose. These concepts reflected the change from individuals relying on organizations for career development to individuals assuming responsibility for their own career management and employability. Individual competencies, resiliency, and adaptability became more important than organizational commitment as job security decreased.

Sullivan’s (1999) review captured the transition from traditional thinking to the growing interest in the nonlinear, discontinuous careers. In this review, we have examined the further development and clarification of established concepts as well as newer concepts and models that have developed over the past decade. While the previous review found relatively little research on the boundaryless career concept and little research in non-Western countries, we found a growth in research on boundaryless, protean, and other nontraditional career concepts as well as an increase of research in non-Western countries. The previous review called for the greater conceptualization of nontraditional career concepts as well as the development of measures that capture these concepts. This review reported on the evolution of concepts, the development of new ideas, and the creation of instruments to measure these attitudes and highlighted the importance of studying the various types of careers (e.g., protean, hybrid) in today’s complex workplace. Scholars should be cautious, however, and not overestimate the extent to which individuals are enacting nontraditional careers. Due to many factors, including gender and contextual variables (e.g., nation, culture), some individuals are still enacting more traditional paths. Comparing our review to Sullivan’s (1999) review, we note that a number of topics still remain underresearched. More research is still needed on underrepresented populations, such as blue-collar workers, immigrant workers, the disabled, and minorities, as well as on those making major transitions (e.g., midlife career changes, moving from the military to civilian life). Additional investigation of how nonpaid work (i.e., volunteerism) contributes to people’s careers is also needed.

In this review, we have examined the progress and trends of the past decade as well as detailed directions for future research. We hope this review offers greater insights into the careers literature and encourages further research on the changing nature of careers.

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Notes

1. Baruch (2008) also developed a seven-item scale to measure the original conceptualization of the protean career (see Table 1). The Baruch scale has been employed in a number of studies and has demonstrated strong validity and reliability in the United States, United Kingdom, and Vietnam (Baruch, 2008; Baruch, Bell, & Gray, 2005; Baruch & Quick, 2007; Pham, Baruch, & He, 2009).

2. Initial conceptualizations and research on the boundaryless career concept also has focused on positive career outcomes with little recognition of potential negative outcomes.

3. Thanks to an anonymous Journal of Management reviewer for suggesting the application of the social information perspective to study psychological mobility.

References


Sullivan and Baruch


