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**The values of the Brazilian protean and the tensions between their career and culture**

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** In a protean career, individuals' subjective goals inform their professional path and share their definitions of success. The concept was conceptualized based on individualistic western countries' perspectives. This study aims to examine if the protean careerist of Brazil, a non-western country, is similar to the typical protean uncovered in the western context. Moreover, it seeks to understand if culture can set extra challenges for protean careerists in cultures that value objective rewards.

**Method:** Purposive and snowball sampling were used to pre-select participants who have taken protean steps. Next, a Brazilian Portuguese version of a protean scale was used as an inclusion criterion. Then, 24 semi-structured interviews with Brazilian protean professionals helped to understand the tensions between a protean career and the country's culture. Interview questions explored career steps and experiences in being protean within their cultural environment. Finally, thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the dataset.

**Results:** The data analysis led to 12 categories split into two themes. The first theme focused on the values and preferences of the Brazilian protean. The second theme talked about Brazil as a context for protean careers. Findings confirmed that the values of the Brazilian protean are similar to those of western protean professionals. Yet, there is tension between cultural dimensions in the country and the protean career. From one side, the Brazilian protean pursues intrapersonal success outcomes, such as personal fulfillment. On the other hand, they consider financial rewards, an interpersonal success outcome. The findings indicate that preferences for intrapersonal or interpersonal career outcomes are shaped by one's culture.

**Conclusion:** This research shows that counterbalancing cultural aspects with chosen career styles facilitates protean careers in adverse contexts. Furthermore, it advises that concepts coined in a given cultural setting should not be generalized to other contexts without scrutiny. In that line, future protean studies must examine a variety of countries. The consideration of culture also has practical implications. In collectivistic countries, such as Brazil, opinions from family have a higher impact on career decisions. Thus, organizations hiring protean individuals from collectivistic cultures should consider families' role in career decisions.

*Key Words:* protean career, Brazil, culture, career success, non-traditional career, non-western culture

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## Introduction

Following a specific type of career might be determined by what motivates a person: extrinsic or intrinsic incentives. First, extrinsic reasons are a means to another goal. That means that individuals choose their careers considering the benefits of a particular job or occupation. In other words, workers are motivated by objective outcomes, such as a well-paid job (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018) and advancement (Benson et al., 2020). Second, intrinsic reasons include achieving work satisfaction by following people's subjective interests. Therefore, individuals focus on the pleasure that comes with a specific profession (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018) and success is internally assessed (Benson et al., 2020).

Traditional careers are more predictable and focused on extrinsic success (Baruch & Quick, 2007), hierarchical advancement, and limited organizational and physical mobility (Gubler et al., 2012). However, workers are changing their preferences from a traditional career to one that allows more adaptation. Likewise, people started placing emphasis on freedom as opposed to career advancement (McGinley, 2018). Those shifts led to the rise of a protean career in which the goal is to reach intrinsic success (Hall, 1996) and psychological realization (Gubler et al., 2012). Despite being coined in 1976, the protean career model has received more attention since 2006 (Hall et al., 2018). Additionally, almost 100 results about the topic were found on a Scopus search that included the last five years.

Culture is a macro aspect influencing people's careers (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022). Therefore, the level of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations can vary according to the country one comes from (Olowookere et al., 2021). Thus, although the protean careerist is known for being guided by intrinsic motivators (Gubler et al., 2014), the impact of those motivators could be different in an unexplored cultural context for protean careers. In that line of reasoning, culture could enable or hinder a protean career.

Despite the growing research, the protean career is normally connected with individualistic western cultures (Gubler et al., 2014). Collective cultures, especially, do not receive much

attention in the studies of careers theories (Hong et al., 2022). For this reason, the role of culture needs to be examined further (Baruch, 2014) to understand how culture may potentially influence career choices in non-western collectivistic contexts. The occurrence of a protean career in such cultures is a scarcely answered question that demands more attention. For example, power distance and uncertainty avoidance are negatively associated with adaptability, a characteristic of protean professionals (Gunkel et al., 2013).

Using Brazil as the context, this study discusses whether protean careerists' experiences are affected by their cultural background. To do so, participants are interviewed about protean careers in the context of Brazil. The country was chosen because some cultural dimensions in Brazil – namely uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and power distance (Hofstede, 2011) – could constrain a protean career. Furthermore, most research about protean careers has been carried out in western countries (Zafar et al., 2021), with the typical protean having a western background.

The goals of this paper are twofold: first, learn the characteristics of the protean professional in a non-western concept. Second, consider to what extent culture influences individuals' careers. More specifically, to answer two questions:

- 1) How similar is the Brazilian protean to the western type?
- 2) How do Brazilian protean workers experience tensions with the country's values and culture?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This chapter will show that the connection between protean careers and culture has not received enough consideration. The lack of attention is a surprise since culture is a macro aspect influencing people's careers (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022). More specifically, how a protean career can be followed in a non-western collectivistic country will be questioned. This discussion is brought up because the protean concept was developed in a western individualistic context. Thus, studying a protean career from the perspective of culture helps to understand the pertinence of

the model in different realities. The following topics will be further elaborated on: a) Protean Careers, b) Culture, c) The Role of Culture in Protean Careers and d) Cultures in Brazil.

### **Protean Careers**

One of the most significant career changes in the last decades was the focus from a traditional to a non-traditional career model (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022). A traditional career is when the person seeks extrinsic success, such as a good salary and role promotion (Hall et al., 2018). In addition, security and stability are keywords in a conventional work style (Tomlinson et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the protean career is a career model perspective in which individuals feel responsible for guiding their professional life instead of outsourcing the responsibility to organizations (Hall, 1996). In a protean path, the career goal is to fulfill subjective purposes that depend on the feeling of satisfaction and psychological realization (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Career success can be assessed objectively and subjectively (Baba Rahim, 2020), and their predictors are not the same (Baruch et al., 2020). Objective career success is reaching tangible and quantifiable accomplishments. Concepts such as promotions, advancement and salary are an objective success. On the other hand, subjective career success could be reaching psychological realization and achieving personal goals (Hall et al., 2018). Job satisfaction is an example of subjective success (Kundi et al., 2021). Protean careers are associated with both subjective and objective career success and with achieving intrinsic and extrinsic goals (Io Presti & Elia, 2020). Nevertheless, protean professionals are known for favoring intrinsic values (Hall et al., 2018). Therefore, success for protean careerists is based on values, pride, and personal accomplishment (Baruch et al., 2020).

Protean professionals do not choose their career path based primarily on position and salary (McGinley, 2018). They are also self-aware of their interest, which enables them to follow a path based on intrinsic values (Cortellazzo et al., 2020). Furthermore, protean individuals embrace a whole-life perspective in which careers are not separated from other life dimensions

(Direnzo et al., 2015). This means they consider careers from a broader perspective, with work and outside-work dimensions being important and interdependent (Han & Hwang, 2021). For those who follow a whole-life philosophy, career decisions are also made considering the impact on various parts of their lives (Cortellazzo et al., 2020), and satisfaction comes from responsibilities in different aspects of life (Direnzo et al., 2015). Interestingly, highly employable professionals, like the protean, have a greater possibility of maintaining a work-life balance (Direnzo et al., 2015).

The protean career model has changed the focus from job security to employability (Baruch et al., 2020). Consequently, individuals work towards acquiring skills that can secure positions in different organizations (Io Presti & Elia, 2020). Employability is the ability to maintain a job or quickly find a new one. Meanwhile, perceived employability is the judgment someone makes about their chances of securing a job. There is a correlation between both perceived employability and employability from one side and protean career from the other (Cortellazzo et al., 2020). On the contrary, no connection was established between perceived employability and a traditional career orientation (Baruch et al., 2020).

Different elements are reported to be traits of protean careerists (Gubler et al., 2014). For example, they are proactive in their career and go after what they want (Briscoe et al., 2006). Thus, being agentic is expected from professionals with this orientation (Gubler et al., 2014). Likewise, they are willing to develop new skills (Chui et al., 2020) and are known for having a learning orientation (Briscoe et al., 2006; Hall, 1996; Hall, 2004). Although not their primary goal, the acquired new skills can contribute to achieving objective career success and organizational goals (Sultana & Malik, 2019). Finally, a protean professional is adaptive to different circumstances (Chui et al., 2020) and open to changing their career path (Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007). Supposedly, people with a high protean orientation have a greater chance of reemployment due to proactivity and adaptability (Ayoobzadeh, 2021). Thus, inflexible people conflict with a protean career because of the likelihood of changing environments (Cortellazzo et



al., 2020). In that direction, protean careerists often experience interruptions and career transitions (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022).

Much of the protean literature addresses the attitude rather than the actual protean behavior (Abdalla et al., 2019). However, this research understands protean careerists as those who do not necessarily abide by objective and measurable definitions of success, such as high payment and high position (Hall, 2004). Additionally, they have taken significant steps to follow a path in the pursuit of their own subjective goals. For instance, they have switched jobs sectors to find a better fit, adjusted careers despite previous professional backgrounds, or moved to a country better suited to their aspirations. In common, stability, power, and money are not the main drives in those decisions, but other intrinsic reasons pushed their choices, such as starting a new degree, learning languages, and seeking more quality of life in another country.

### **The role of Culture in Careers**

Family socialization has been shown to impact work attitudes in a protean career (Sargent & Domberger, 2007). Likewise, the context of society and culture can be included as other influential aspects (Chudzikowski et al., 2011). Nonetheless, there is still no substantial evidence about the enablers of protean professionals (Hall et al., 2018).

Culture is defined as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2001, p.9, as cited in Gunkel et al., 2013). A known framework to study culture is Hofstede Dimensions, which allows comparing different cultures, thereby being a relative measure between countries (Hofstede, 2011). Specific cultural values can have weighted relevance in studying careers (Benson et al., 2020). Thus, among the six dimensions of Hofstede, three were chosen for this research: uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and individualism/collectivism. There are two reasons why those dimensions were selected. First, those are dimensions in which Brazil scores above average (Hofstede Insights, n.d) and may be important indicators to distinguish Brazilian culture from others. Second, they

have been in the model since it was first proposed; hence, more investigations about them have been carried out (Hofstede, 2011).

Firstly, uncertainty avoidance is the degree to which people can deal with a lack of structure and accept ambiguity (Hofstede, 2011). In cultures strong in this dimension, people are resistant to change, do not take risks (Smale et al., 2019), and stay in jobs even if they dislike them (Hofstede, 2011). Conversely, a frequent employment change is related to weaker uncertainty avoidance (Mazurkiewicz, 2020). Employees from high uncertainty avoidance countries favor job stability, salary, and lifetime employment. A good wage is deemed essential to reach job satisfaction in such countries (Gu et al., 2022). Secondly, power distance is the acceptance that power is not equally distributed in society. Thus, in countries high in this dimension, employees expect managers to guide them (Hofstede, 2011). Lastly, individualism/collectivism is important to uncover if the priority is given to personal preferences or the group's benefits. People from individualistic societies have higher professional mobility, value challenging positions (Mazurkiewicz, 2020), and are more independent in choosing their path (Smale et al., 2019). In contrast, collective societies value professional stability (Mazurkiewicz, 2020). When it comes to career decisions, individualistic countries tend to choose based on intrinsic motivation. Conversely, the youth in collective countries make their decisions based on extrinsic motives, and family and friends' opinions are also regarded (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). A study focusing on Nigeria, a collective country with high power distance and uncertainty avoidance, found workers primarily motivated by salary (Olowookere et al., 2021).

Coming from different cultures influences people's preferences (Cordeiro & Albuquerque, 2017) and behaviors (Abdalla et al., 2019). Also, cultural differences shape the type of career one follows (Hong et al., 2022). More specifically, it contributes to the value people give to job characteristics. For instance, people from some nations yearn for social connection, while others prefer to work autonomously (Gu et al., 2022). Career decisions in collective countries stem from the need for relatedness, whereas autonomy might be the primary motivation in individualistic

ones (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). For example, individuals from a collectivistic and high-power distance country, such as Ukraine, have their self-efficacy connected to others. On the other hand, people in individualistic countries are self-reliant, which helps to manage and plan their careers (Zehetner et al., 2020). Finally, young adults' expectation of complying with societal and family values is higher in collective than in individualistic countries (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018).

The cultural values of a society affect individual definitions of success and particular career choices (Benson et al., 2020). This is because people in different cultures draw from various norms and values in assessing career success (Smale et al., 2019). Definitions of success can be related to interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes. Interpersonal definitions are related to the validation of success from the external world, such as job progression and contribution to an organization. Intrapersonal definitions belong to the individual's inner assessment of what success means (Benson et al., 2020). The occurrence of intrapersonal definitions of success, such as personal fulfillment, achieving personal goals, and personal growth and development, can vary in different countries (Benson et al., 2020). Hence, culture may be important in defining career success, being an enabler or constraint of career models that value non-objective achievements. Cultural dimensions will play a role in how individuals see and pursue their professional life, and people will encounter specific challenges depending on their country of origin.

### **Careers in Brazil**

A frequent issue with career theories is that they were developed and tested in the western context, especially those from an Anglo-Saxon background (Baruch et al., 2020). For example, only 1% of peer-review papers about protean careers were conducted in South America (Hall et al., 2018), and Brazil has not been the object of many investigations on the topic (Liberato Borges et al., 2015).

Brazil has a mix of cultures due to different civilizations, such as native Indians, Africans, Europeans, and Asians who went to Brazil in different waves (Hofstede et al., 2010). The

combination of western and non-western characteristics in the country gives rise to the “Brazilian Dilemma”. Following rules for some procedures but using personal connections for others is a sign of this dilemma (de Hilal, 2006). Brazil is one of the biggest democracies in the world (Stuenkel, 2011), but some of its social practices could be deemed corrupt in Western societies (de Hilal, 2006). Thus, Brazil is, from one perspective, a hierarchical society and, from the other, strives for equality and democracy (Drury & DaMatta, 2020). That dichotomy may explain the possibility of a protean career in the country against the odds.

When it comes to careers, Brazilians avoid planning and are guided by external appeals rather than personal choices (Cordeiro & Albuquerque, 2017). Yet, while one-quarter of workers in Brazil want stability, another quarter is driven by flexibility (Ribeiro, 2015), which is a protean trait. Being from Brazil, a collective country, would mean less professional mobility and pursuing a career that prioritizes group stability. Similarly, Brazilians would seek a permanent employer due to high uncertainty avoidance. Lastly, nationals from the country would not adapt easily because high power distance cultures are less likely to morph. Even with this negative scenario, 46% of Brazilians have given intrapersonal career success definitions (Benson et al., 2020), indicating that they could be a fit for a protean career. That is because people from cultures that do not traditionally value subjective success could still manage to pursue one with the right incentive. For example, social security could explain the shift people give to intrinsic values when they have social welfare programs (Huang & van de Vliert, 2003).

In cultures where agency is not valued, such as collectivist ones, showing proactive behavior can be challenging (Abdalla et al., 2019). Studying career orientation in BRICS countries – an alliance of emerging economies – is important due to the social and cultural diversity between countries in the coalition and the Western World (Baruch et al., 2020). Using Brazil as a background, this research aims to understand if cultural dimensions can shape people's experience in following a protean career. Additionally, it intends to appoint how similar the

Brazilian protean is to those uncovered by previous research focused on western countries (Gubler et al., 2014).

## **Conclusion**

A protean career entails fulfilling subjective goals rather than objective ones (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Those professionals might disregard high income, promotions, and stability in pursuing other intrinsic motivations (McGinley, 2018). Protean careerists pursue subjective success, and that varies according to society's values (Benson et al., 2020). Definitions of success can be interpersonal and intrapersonal, which is also affected by a country's culture. Hence, culture will be a component of someone's professional preferences (Hong et al., 2022).

However, the role of culture is an unresolved issue in protean careers. Scholars have suggested using a variety of cultural contexts (Baruch, 2014) to investigate if the protean career construct is consistent across different countries (Hall et al., 2018). Although scarce, the shortage of research in non-western cultures about the protean career has been addressed. It indicates that a protean career is less evident, for example, in collective cultures due to a lack of individual agency (Supeli & Creer, 2016).

This chapter discussed three of the Hofstede Dimensions to argue why Brazil is theoretically unfit for protean careers. For example, uncertainty-avoidance would make people resistant to changes. Furthermore, collective cultures may find it harder to make career choices independently (Smale et al., 2019). Finally, the protean concept was drawn in western individualistic contexts (Baruch et al., 2020), and dissimilar cultures are often ignored in research. Thus, the choice of Brazil foresees barriers that its nationals face in a protean career.

## **Methods**

### **Study Design and Data Collection**

The study design encompassed two steps. First, participants' orientations were tested with a protean career orientation (PCO) scale (Baruch, 2014). Then, semi-structured interviews were

carried out with those who were confirmed as having a PCO. Interviews are one of the most common ways to collect information from people (Kumar, 2010) and, therefore, selected to gain in-depth data (Paradis et al., 2016). Although interviews are time-consuming (Kumar, 2010), it was critical primary data that allowed people to share their life experiences (Marczyk et al., 2005). Semi-structured interviews have been used by scholars studying protean careers (Crowley-Henry, 2007; Kilimnik et al., 2011; Gunasekara et al., 2021; Sargent & Domberger, 2007). Due to the nature of the study, purposive sampling, a type of non-probabilistic selection (Kumar, 2010), was adequate to choose the participants that met the criteria (Singh, 2006) and fit a protean career. Furthermore, snowball sampling contributed to reaching the contacts of the initially chosen subjects (Kumar, 2010). A message inviting participants was sent through WhatsApp to potential participants and posted on LinkedIn (Appendix A). The BMS Ethics Committee / Domain Humanities & Social Sciences retrospectively advised, based on the information provided, that there were no ethical concerns regarding this research project.

### ***Protean Career Orientation Scale***

The use of a unidimensional protean career scale for non-western countries that have high collectivism was supported by previous research (Sultana & Malik, 2019). The protean scale (Baruch, 2014) was translated by bilingual individuals using the back-translation method to establish a Portuguese equivalent (Cha et al., 2007). First, the author and three other bilinguals translated, individually, the scale from English to Portuguese. Then, they discussed the translation to reach a common ground. Next, four other individuals translated the Portuguese version back to the original language to check for meaning. Finally, the two versions were compared, and the Portuguese translation was adjusted until it had the same meaning as the original one. This procedure was done to increase the reliability of the translated version and ensure the instrument captures the orientation. The protean scale, consisting of 7 items, is considered reliable ( $\alpha = .757$ ). The Portuguese-translated version of the protean scale is available in Appendix B.

Prior to sending the protean scale, the author communicated with potential participants to understand their careers. The instrument was only sent to those whose behaviors were deemed by the author as protean, such as resigning from a government position. Additionally, the level of diverse professional experience was used to indicate someone's level of protean orientation (McGinley, 2018).

Participants were not informed beforehand that the questionnaire could screen them out. Participants with scores above an average of 5 in a 7-point Likert scale were included. In total, 33 people completed the survey and only two were filtered out for being below the minimum required. That initial discussion before the official invitation might have contributed to the low number of people filtered out.

Table 1 shows the summary of the protean orientation by statement considering the average of all respondents. Since a 7-point Likert scale was used, each statement's mean could lie between 1 and 7. For example, the statement "I take responsibility for my own development" had the highest average in the group studied (M= 6.4, SD=1) and the statement "If I have to find a new job, it would be easy" had the lowest average (M=4.9, SD=1.4).

**Table 1**

***Protean scale summary of responses***

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
For me, career success is how I am doing against my goals and values	6.3	0.8
I navigate my own career, mostly according to my plans	5.6	1.3
If I have to find a new job, it would be easy	4.9	1.4
I am in charge of my own career	6.3	1.0
I take responsibility for my own development	6.4	1.0
Freedom and autonomy are driving forces in my career	6.0	1.3
For me, career success means having flexibility in my job	5.2	1.5

*Note.* The protean scale came from Baruch (2014), and it is used to classify someone as having a protean orientation. This scale was translated and used in Portuguese. The mean considers an average per statement among all participants' responses.

## **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted from 09/04/2022 to 12/05/2022 via Microsoft Teams. They were recorded and automatically transcribed with the participants' permission. The interviews were conducted online in Portuguese and lasted between 32 and 125 minutes ( $M=71$ ,  $SD=25$ ), adding up to 539 pages of analyzed transcripts. The first interview worked as a pilot and examined the interview flow and whether the questions were understood correctly (Kumar, 2010). As a result of this phase, some questions were removed, others added or rephrased. The interview guide comprised 16 questions.

The questions explored participants' work history, career goals, protean decisions and views on Brazilian cultural aspects that influence their careers. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, follow-up questions were added to clarify the interviewee's answers. The conversations started by asking participants to talk more about their careers. Participants were prompted to start from the point they felt was more relevant. They were also asked to highlight the more significant moments. The first question typically took the longest to be answered, with participants spending between 10 to 30 minutes to respond it. Next, participants were asked to debate their professional and personal values. Following that, the interviews focused on their careers, with questions about future plans, career satisfaction, and how they define career success. Their definitions of career success were later classified according to Benson et al. (2020). Finally, the interview concentrated on culture and how career was affected by it. For instance, participants were asked if their career fit their culture. They were also inquired about family's and friends' support throughout career decisions. The interview guide is available in Appendix C.

## **Participants**

The final 24 participants were selected in three steps. First, the author invited participants who allegedly made career choices in the pursuit of subjective success and overlooked things such as stability, salary, promotion, or social expectations. Some potential participants were



rejected after concluding that their behavior would not fit the research purpose. Second, a scale of protean career orientation was used to test participants' orientations (Baruch, 2014), which also led to the dismissal of two respondents. After those two steps, 31 people were interviewed. However, the author decided to discard interviews from participants who had not completed a bachelor's degree. As most participants were highly educated, this measure was taken to avoid discrepancy and ensure that participants had the same level of educational background. Therefore, all final 24 participants matched three criteria: they had concluded higher education, possessed the professional experience, and taken protean steps such as resigning from well-paid governmental positions or starting a new career after years of experience. Based on the sample size of other qualitative studies, a minimum of 20 participants were initially deemed sufficient to answer the research question (Galvin, 2015). For means of comparison, other protean career studies used sample sizes between 19 and 38 (Crowley-Henry, 2007; Kilimnik et al., 2011; Gunasekara et al., 2021; Sargent & Domberger, 2007). Therefore, the sample of the present study – 24 participants – is considered adequate.

Table 2 depicts the summary of participants' information. Participants are identified by the code given after the interviews – from P1 to P31. Although seven interviewed participants were not used for data analysis, the initial codes were maintained when referring to the participants. Names were also altered to protect subjects' privacy. Participants (9 men and 15 females) were aged between 26 and 46 ( $M=34$ ,  $SD=5.9$ ). They had between 4 years and 24 years of professional experience ( $M=12$ ,  $SD=6$ ). Participants were asked to consider their total working experience in years, regardless of their specific work areas. Eight interviewees had a bachelor's degree, 12 a postgraduate diploma and four a master's degree. Psychology, physics, public relations, pharmacy, law and engineering were some of their degrees. Participants' current occupations varied, and some of their roles were business analyst, sales advisor, translator, reporter, and auditing manager. All participants lie in the protean orientation defined for this study. The lowest protean orientation among respondents was 5.1 and the highest was 6.8 ( $M= 5.9$ ,  $SD= 0.5$ ).

**Table 2*****Summary of participants' information***

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Current position</b>	<b>Protean orientation</b>
P1- Everton	37	Male	Postgraduated	Human Resources	13	Business Analyst	5.7
P2- Vicente	34	Male	Undergraduated	Physics	16	Physics professor	6.4
P3 - Simone	41	Female	Master	Psychology	18	Psychologist	6.8
P4 - Guilherme	40	Male	Postgraduated	Biology	17	Business partner	5.2
P6 - Luana	33	Female	Postgraduated	Psysioterapia	12	Physioterapist	6.2
P7 - Rosilene	39	Female	Postgraduated	Tourism	18	Team leader	5.2
P8 - Katherin	33	Female	Postgraduated	Accounting	15	Auditing Manager	5.8
P11 - Elisa	33	Female	Undergraduated	Business Administration	10	Student	5.7
P12 - Wellington	37	Male	Postgraduated	Engineer	12	Senior Data Analyst	5.8
P13 - Walter	31	Male	Undergraduated	Public Relations	10	Entrepreneur	6.5
P14 - Alessandro	41	Male	Postgraduated	Engineer	15	Electrical Maintenance Coordinator	6.0
P16 - Hendy	26	Female	Postgraduated	Languages	10	Translator	5.7
P17 - Sona	28	Female	Postgraduated	Engineer	8	Au Pair	6.4
P19 - Michel	29	Male	Undergraduated	Law	9	Cashier	6.0
P20 - Aimée	26	Female	Postgraduated	Law	4	Au Pair	5.1
P21 - Shirley	38	Female	Master	Journalism	18	Reporter	6.7
P22 - Alicia	28	Female	Master	Occupational therapy	4	Housewife	5.5
P23 - Jorge	46	Male	Postgraduated	Communications	20	Consultant	6.5
P24 - Evellyn	29	Female	Undergraduated	Tourism	5	Au Pair	5.1
P27 - Aline	27	Female	Undergraduated	Law	4	Waitress and cashier	6.0
P28 - Deborah	36	Female	Undergraduated	Journalism	20	Customer Support	5.1
P29 - Jaime	43	Male	Postgraduated	Journalism	24	Student	5.5
P30 - Janize	27	Female	Master	Pharmacy	4	Nanny	6.4
P31 - Maristela	40	Female	Undergraduated	Journalism	20	Sales Advisor	5.8

Note. Participants' names were altered to protect their privacy. The initial code of participant were main

**Data Analysis**

Before starting the analysis, the author reviewed the transcriptions and got further familiarized with the data. Then, the thematic analysis allowed finding similarities in the dataset

(Braun & Clarke, 2014). A coding scheme was created with an inductive approach, considering the active role of the researcher in identifying patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The codes were only created after getting into contact with the transcriptions and without a pre-determined coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The coding process was iterative, with categories created, merged, and deleted when they did not fit the research objectives. Some codes were collapsed and others deleted for being infrequent. For instance, the category “money – important but not everything” and “economic aspects in Brazil that influence their decisions” became a single category named “economic aspects”. Also, the category “uncertainty avoidance” initially had three subcategories (“a career with stability might be the way to go”, “despite some benefits, stability is not a must” and “stability as traditional in Brazil”). Those became a single category discussing different aspects related to uncertainty avoidance. The category “perceptions and views about the Brazilian culture” and its subcategories were removed due to the limited amount of discussion that could be derived from the comments. The final coding scheme identified two themes and 12 categories. Around 1100 comments were coded after 24 interviews, which were eventually decreased to 562 comments. Narrower themes and categories and the deletion of non-representative comments contributed to the reduction.

Initially, around 10% (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020) of the comments were randomly selected to be coded by an independent coder to increase the objectivity and validity of classifications (Cho, 2008). The second coder used the coding scheme created by the author to recategorize the selected comments (but without having comments as examples of each category). As a result, 42% of all the comments agreed with the original coding scheme. After comparing the results, the author and the second coder discussed the categories, and the scheme was refined. For example, categories were better specified and described. Also, some comments were proven to fit more than one category. After those changes, there was an 89% coding agreement. In order to further increase the coder reliability, the second and a new third coder were each given another 10% of

the total comments to recategorize after the first adjustments in the scheme. The initial agreement in this batch was 66% for the second coder and 53% for the third coder. Agreement with the second coder went up to 97% and 95% with the third coder after some changes, such as merging two subcategories related to uncertainty avoidance and stability, deleting identified problematic snippets, and discussing the meaning behind some of the quotations. Additionally, the author went through all the comments in one of the categories due to the disagreement found on it. Yet, that same category was removed at a later stage. To test if all changes were effective, another 10% of the comments were discussed and recategorized together by the author and the third coder, and this time the agreement was 93%. Previous studies mentioned an 80% agreement as acceptable intercoder reliability (Belur et al., 2018). In total, roughly 30% of all comments were reviewed by two coders in the first phase.

Further changes happened after the first draft of this study was submitted. For instance, a category was merged (learning as value and learning as a reason for a protean path), another category was renamed (related to ethical working values) and whole categories were deleted (reasons for the protean behavior). The goal of those adjustments was to include only the essential categories to answer the research questions. In the final coding round, 20% of the remaining extracts were given to independent coders to assess whether statements represented a given category. This resulted in kappas of 0.84 for the first theme and 0.76 for the second.

## Results

In total, two themes and 12 categories were uncovered. *Values and Preferences of the Brazilian Protean* encompass characteristics of a protean careerist who comes from a non-western country. It shows how similar or different they are from the “typical” Western protean. On the other hand, *Brazil as a Context for Non-Western Protean Professionals* addresses how cultural and economic aspects in the country can enable or hinder a protean career. Therefore, while the first theme focuses on the protean as an individual, the second emphasizes the cultural

peculiarities of their countries. Jointly, both themes contribute to answering two main research questions: 1) How similar is the Brazilian protean to the western type?? and 2) How do Brazilian protean workers experience tensions with the country's values and culture?

### Theme 1: Values and Preferences of the Brazilian Protean

Brazilian protean professionals discussed personality traits, values and career success definitions. This theme illustrates the most common characteristics among protean participants. In addition, this theme showed that the Brazilian protean backbone is similar to the protean uncovered in the western world (Briscoe et al., 2006; Chui et al., 2020; Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007). Table 3 shows the values and preferences of the Brazilian protean.

**Table 1**

#### ***Results of the thematic analysis that created Theme 1 – Values and Preferences of the Brazilian Protean***

Category	Definition	Sample comment
<b>Learning and Development</b> 68 comments	Brazilian protean professionals value the possibility of learning new skills and growing in their careers	"I have to form some knowledge so that I can be a valuable resource, as a professional, with the skills that I possess, to be able to transit through the market without fear of having to be attached to the security of an exam I passed." (P1)
<b>Flexibility, Autonomy and Freedom</b> 57 comments	Deciding when and how to do something and having the flexibility to do is a must for the Brazilian protean.	"So, in my professional life, what I'm looking for, is also a question of geographical freedom as well. It is to be able to reach [new places]. I don't know how yet, but I am in search of not being tied to a place with a fixed schedule." (P30)
<b>Whole-life</b> 53 comments	There is more to life than just work, and professional and personal decisions are intertwined for participants. Having a balanced life is essential.	"Today I value these personal issues, if it is my work, it causes problems in my family life, in my love relationship, in my professional life for other perspectives, in my quality of life, in my travels, in my learning, it no longer serves me" (P23)
<b>Dedication and Persistency</b> 29 comments	Participants recognize that they were dedicated and made efforts to achieve what they wanted.	"I have always been very proactive, I have always studied hard, I have worked hard to get where I want, but I think that the push there really made it easier [conditions provided by parents]. After I made certain types of decisions, I never had difficulties doing things, you know? I was never a person who does things halfway."(P20)
<b>Career Success Definitions</b> 24 comments	Participants define career success in a subjective way. Many of them mentioned more than one point as part of success.	"I think being happy, satisfied with what you do, with life in general, because the job takes most of the time of adult life, so being...to be happy in life, you have to be happy in your job." (P24)
<b>Meaningful and Ethical Work</b> 18 comments	Protean professionals value ethical work that follows the right procedures, and that has a purpose.	"I thought the product itself was the customer. "Look, you have to sell so many capitalizations or lend so much money..." No, but wait, what does the client want? What do they need? What is important to them? If I sell them something now, it may not be the best... And that really bothered me. Sometimes they put themselves as a place that took care of the client, that cared about the client, and I saw that this did not match reality. If I care about the client, I have to listen to what the client wants and try to give them what is most appropriate." (P1)
<b>Employability</b> 12 comments	Participants think they are a valuable resource and that they can find another job if they want. They also recognize that being employable is important to following their career, and hence they need to find ways to do so.	"I think that today, if I want to be employed again in the private sector, I can get a job, I am not afraid of that, but in what I do, studying is a constant, it is necessary (P3)"

### ***Dedication and Persistency***

Proactivity and adaptability were pointed out as a strong characteristic of the protean (Ayoobzadeh, 2021). Hence, the Brazilian protean also conforms to what is expected from someone following a non-traditional career. Participants shared how being persistent and dedicated were beneficial throughout their life. Making efforts, sacrificing, continuous improvement, and resilience were seen as a way to achieve long-term goals. After resigning from a permanent position in the judiciary system in Brazil, Walter (P13) comments that his dedication was helpful in the past when taking exams for a competitive government position, and his commitment will help him now as an entrepreneur. His speech highlights the sacrifices he is willing to make in order to reach his goals.

I will need to know how to do something that I didn't know how to do before, so I will have to learn. I am willing to learn, whatever it is, I will need to, I don't know, work on weekends and holidays, which I didn't do before, but I am willing to do it. I was already aware that I would have to do this; it's a matter of availability.

Furthermore, participants also see characteristics, such as being hard workers, in other fellow citizens. Shirley (P21), who works in the US now, recognizes that being Brazilian was an enabler throughout her career changes: "What I think influences my career a lot, that I took from Brazilians, that I think this is ours, is the willingness that Brazilians have to grow, to evolve, to improve, to achieve something better". Maristela (P31) agrees that Brazilians have the capability of being a chameleon and do different things, especially when comparing her experience in other countries: "We are so hardworking, when we want something, we do it and work for two or three, we know how to do a little bit of everything. The majority of Europeans only know how to do one thing".

### ***Learning and Development***

Learning should be constant in a protean career (Hall, 1996; Hall, 2004). Those professionals are known for their learning orientation (Briscoe et al., 2006) and for setting learning goals (Cortellazzo et al., 2020). Fitting this perspective, Brazilian protean professionals showed concern for their development and considered it one of their central values. Participants believe that updating their knowledge and following world trends contribute to a greater chance of growth in their careers. For example, the rise of tech careers was pointed out as an opportunity to acquire sought expertise. Additionally, learning or improving English was mentioned as a way to get better positions in Brazil. Janize (P30) confirms that the main reason for quitting her job in Brazil was to expand her language skills, which she believes will pay off in the future:

If I really go back to Brazil, I think that with English, with good English, I have better job opportunities. I was even looking these days at the job opportunities in Brazil and some of them say they want a person who is fluent in English, mainly because in the health area, there are many articles, many things in English. So, it will be better for my resume.

Shirley (P21) uses a metaphor to explain why lifelong development feels natural to her. According to her, the more someone achieves, the more they want to accomplish. Therefore, one should not stop their learning journey:

It is as if you were climbing a ladder, so each step that you see enables you to see more and enables you to see farther. So, sometimes, the vision that you had when you were on the first step is not the vision that you have today because you have climbed several steps, so you can see much further than you could. And then you can see that you can climb higher. So, I think that this is what happens, you evolve and you see that you can reach further than you imagined. So, you always want a little bit more, a little bit, a little bit more.

### ***Employability***

The positive protean characteristics and their willingness to look for development reflect how the Brazilian protean see themselves in the job market. The feeling of being highly employable was found among Brazilian protean careerists. The employability perception enables changes in the career because professionals believe in their capacity to get new positions. For example, Guilherme (P1), who left a job in a public bank in Brazil to go to a private company, does not fear the future as long as he finds ways to be a competitive resource. For him, having the right expertise makes one employable and, therefore, desirable by employers:

Security comes through knowledge because if I have knowledge of a certain area, of a tool that is necessary, that has a demand, then I will have possibilities. Until recently, I was very worried about this, 'oh no, what about security?' But security also has to do with my ability to reinvent myself.

### ***Whole-life***

A whole-life perspective was tapped by participants who could not think about careers without considering the impact on personal life. Participants value balance between work and personal lives and do not appreciate a heavy workload that constrains time to enjoy other things. Other participants revealed that they would pass over the opportunity for a higher salary if that meant working much more than they currently do. Besides, other aspects of their lives are as or more important than work. Thus, one might decide to adapt their careers to prioritize personal life or other subjective achievements. For example, Alicia (22) has a master's degree but temporarily let go of her career due to her partner's profession:

My career was never the main thing in my life, you know? It was never the main reason in my life, what guided me to the places, where I went, where I stopped going, where I stayed, it was never my career.



### ***Flexibility, Autonomy and Freedom***

Perhaps due to being employable, Brazilian participants have higher expectations of work control. The need for power to decide about different aspects of their career and life was reported by interviewees. For example, the Brazilian protean wants control over their working hours, from where to work, and how tasks should be carried out. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the possibility of remote work became common (Lyutov & Voitkovska, 2021) and contributed to participants wanting to be freer personally and professionally. Vincente (P2) explains what freedom meant to him in the past and what it means now:

The freedom I always dreamed of was the freedom to make decisions, to have the power to make decisions. To have the autonomy to do this and that is it. But today, I seek the other freedom, which is also flexibility. To be able to work wherever I want, this is also what I want today.

### ***Meaningful and Ethical Work***

Brazilian protean values work in which they can act according to their values. Participants shared that they disagreed with following unethical procedures, such as lying to clients and not providing the best healthcare for patients. The lack of morals in the workplace was a reason to give non-traditional steps, such as resigning from stable jobs. Rosilene (P7) worked in a public bank for more than ten years. Still, she disagreed with colleagues crossing ethical boundaries to reach goals. According to her, there is a limit in trying to stand out that she could not cross.

People doing everything to stand out... this bothered me because I wouldn't do it and say: 'I get things by merit, by my work'. And there comes a time when this is no longer enough, to grow a lot, you have to have some irregular things.

### **Career Success Definitions**

The 24 definitions provided by participants are in Appendix D. Those were categorized using Benson et al.'s (2020) four categories comprised of 24 definitions of career success. Most participants shared intrapersonal definitions of success (17 comments). Considering intrapersonal outcomes as a way of success is expected among protean professionals who consider internal appraisals, such as satisfaction. The most common intrapersonal outcome definition among participants was *Personal Fulfillment*, which is connected with a sense of being happy and satisfied with a job. *Doing what you love* – also an intrapersonal definition - was the second most common definition in the study. On the other hand, participants reported a good income as important for career success. Ten definitions tapped into the role of money, two as the main aspect and the other eight as an extra factor in intrapersonal outcomes. Therefore, having a stable financial life is also considered a success for Brazilian protean professionals. Vincent (P2) gives his blended definition, combining *Personal Fulfillment* and *Money* as elements of success: "Waking up happy knowing I'm going to work, spending the day at work happy, and at the end of the month being well paid for what I did".

### **Theme 2: Brazil as a Context for Non-Western Protean Professionals**

Participants were invited to reflect on how their culture shaped their careers. Thus, aspects of Brazil that influence the career of protean professionals were discussed. Three dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 2011) were explored during the interviews, but only two were debated by most participants: uncertainty avoidance and collectivism vs. individualism. The Brazilian protean addresses those cultural aspects in how they followed their careers. Social-economic aspects were also brought as part of the context for the Brazilian protean. Table 4 shows the cultural values of Brazil as a context for the non-western protean professional.

Table 4

**Results of thematic analysis that created Theme 2 – Brazil as a context for non-Western protean professionals**

Category	Definition	Sample comment
<b>Uncertainty Avoidance</b> 127 comments	The protean talks about how they see stability and how important it is in their lives. A common way of stability in Brazil is exam-based public positions (usually with the government), in which, after passing the exam, they have a guaranteed permanent job. Other than government positions, they also comment about uncertainty avoidance in "normal" private jobs.	"This part of stability, no matter how much you want to be open-minded and free. I don't know what, it still has a weight, for sure, you can't say it doesn't, you give up a salary that is for life, it really has a weight"
<b>Economic Aspects</b> 62 comments	Participants comment on aspects of the country that plays a role in their career choices, such as the economy and its consequences (such as public safety and crime). Participants recognize the influence of money in decisions and confirm wanting financial success.	"The financial aspect is very important, because for you to be able to choose which path you want to take and have more freedom, the financial aspect weighs a lot. If you have a financial base that can guarantee you a livelihood and a certain comfort there, even if it is the minimum, you are able to, for example, leave an exam-based public job or whatever, move to another city or do anything, because you know that your financial base is guaranteed".
<b>Collectivism and Family</b> 56 comments	Participants recognize that collectivism is a characteristic in Brazil that affects their lives. Their family has a central role.	"In regards to my personal life, it is important for me my family, so, it is the direction of my life, so, for me the priority is always my family, if there is something that will demand time, energy from me, that will harm my family, I prefer not to do that, because my family always comes first."
<b>Crazy or Courageous</b> 34 comments	Participants report on comments they heard for a protean behavior. Being labeled as brave or crazy were common due to non-traditional decisions.	"Everybody was trying to prove to me all the time that I was crazy, that it was something I shouldn't do"
<b>Individuality of Important Decisions</b> 21 comments	Participants think decisions should be individual and without influence from family and friends.	"It's your decision, you will have to deal with a consequence of this knowing that it was you who chose it, it's more or less something that I also reflected a lot now, like, for example, if the decision I took goes wrong, I will have to deal with this, knowing that I chose this. Like, it was not anyone who forced me to resign from my permanent position."

### **Collectivism and Family**

As expected from a collective country, Brazilian participants mentioned the family's central roles. Participants commented that not only the immediate family but also relatives and other social groups were significant. For example, Brazilians were considered to be welcoming and helpful even to those that are just acquaintances. Some participants who lived in western countries reported missing the warming nature of Brazilians and felt that everyone minded their own businesses. In Brazil, relatives tend to live close to each other, and those who take bolder moves might be perceived as detached. Sona (P17) was afraid to make decisions that would leave her family questioning her love for them: "The family factor still held me back because I did not want to give the impression that I was not happy in Brazil because of them". Sona's concern indicates her fear of going against the cultural aspect of putting the family first.

### ***Individuality of Important Decisions***

Protean professionals are said to have agency and make decisions based on what makes more sense to them (Hall et al., 2018). On the other hand, people from collective cultures consider the impact on others (Smale et al., 2019), which could lead to dependency on approval. The conflict between being a protean and being Brazilian was discussed in the interviews. Deborah (P28) consults her family about important decisions; however, she left a stable job and moved to another country despite their disagreement:

I take [my options] to my family, but I think that in my decision to move, to stay in Ireland, I was more individualistic because I think that if I were to really think of my family as a whole like, I would not have gone [to Ireland] or I would not have stayed [in Ireland], understand?

Therefore, even when opinions in the family are asked, they are often disregarded. Other participants were more self-assured about making decisions individually. Several comments revealed that important decisions should not be based on others' opinions. Jaime (P29) said that he is now able to distinguish what is good for him regardless of his family's opinion:

With life experience, you already start to dissociate, you already start to see, 'come on, this is good for me. My mother thinks it is bad, but it is not'. You end up at a certain moment making your own decisions and seeing that you even understand what your family thinks, but you have to follow your own path, right?

### ***Uncertainty Avoidance***

A major topic was being comfortable or not with unpredictability. Taking exams to work in government positions is very popular in Brazil and many participants abide by this desire. It is often a dream that people pursue for years. Those positions are known as a *contest*, and approved candidates say they have *passed the contest*. Alessandro (P14) explains: "We see that

people want so much to pass the contest, right? People take so much time, study, study, study to be able to pass, right?". Very competitive, public positions are usually more well paid than working for private companies and offer a guaranteed permanent job. That means that people cannot be fired or made redundant, only in exceptional situations. The figure of the *concurseiro* (a person always studying for exam-based positions) is well known and personalizes the uncertainty avoidance that many Brazilians seek. Even among those who have never been in those positions, there is still the idea of being an easy job. For instance, Jaime (P13) shares what he heard when people were trying to convince him to study for an exam: "You won't do anything, you'll earn so much. You will have vacations all year long".

Protean professionals also shared their views of what is considered traditional for a career in Brazil. Taking exams for government positions and progressing in the same job were discussed as conventional. Hendy (P16) believes that people go through this expected route even when they do not want: "I think that even though sometimes people do not want to take an exam for a government job, they end up doing it to have this stability". The awareness that stability might be necessary was found among participants. Before resigning from a city hall position, Michel (P19) considered what that would mean to his future: "We in Brazil have a lot of insecurity in private companies because in the public sector we have the stability aspect, you don't get fired, you stay there". Other participants shared the relief a government position could have given them: "it gave me a kind of comfort, so 'hey, I have something guaranteed, right?' I'm 20 years old and I already had a guaranteed stability, I didn't need to feel desperate" (Alicia, P22).

Despite the views of traditions in the country, Brazilian protean professionals explained that avoiding uncertainty through stability is not a strong need for them. Moreover, some see stability from a different angle. Aline (P27), a law graduate who started a business while waitressing, talked about what stability means to her:

I want to have stability, but not the way we think of it in Brazil, you know? The stability of exam-based positions. I want to have the stability of a quiet life. I am working on other ways to achieve stability through investment. When I say stability, I mean more financial stability, right? Because today I don't think about work stability.

Participants also showed frustration when people expected them to try a government position: "Someone says 'you are graduating, so are you already studying for a contest?' Obviously, it is good to have stability, but I have no interest in studying for that" (Guilherme, P4). Aline and Guilherme's comments evidenced that protean careerists in Brazil do not have stability and job security as their main goals.

### ***Crazy or Courageous Decisions***

Walking away from stability in Brazil was not without concern and judgment. People around them – family or acquaintances – were surprised and deemed the decision mad or daring. Due to such opinions, protean professionals wondered if choices were realistic and, in some cases, avoided talking about the topic. The reactions reinforced the idea that stability and moving up in the same organization are expected in the country. Sona's (P17) mother is habituated to her non-traditional decisions:

I believe that the fact that I gave up a job for the second time, as my mother says 'is one more of your crazy things, right?' She was always questioning me, saying 'how long are you going to keep doing that?'".

Guilherme (P1) received admiration from others who wanted to do the same but were afraid: "colleagues' reactions were 'that's good that you can do it, I wish I had that courage, at the moment I don't have it'".

### ***Economic Aspects***

Brazilian protean professionals emphasize the role of money despite their non-traditional career steps. Although financial gains are not the primary concern, it is taken into consideration during career decisions. Jaime (P29) wishes for a career in which he balances earning a good wage with satisfaction:

One thing I am sure of what I don't want, what I won't do, I won't work with something, something that only gives me financial return. And I won't work with something that also doesn't give me any financial return. So, I want to find this middle ground.

The country's economy needs to be always weighed. Participants were aware that finding a new job might not always be easy due to the Brazilian economy. Characteristics in Brazil caused by the lack of opportunities were also brought up. For example, increased violence and poor public security are a by-product of the financial problems that the country faces. Therefore, the need to avoid instability connects to both economic and cultural aspects. Sona (P17), who moved from Brazil to the Netherlands, explains the past feeling of being at risk and putting loved ones in danger:

If I received an offer in Brazil... for example, when I was there in January last year, I applied for a position I was crazy about it. Today, if I received an offer for that same position, I would not accept because of the public security issue, because I no longer want to depend on a person to pick me up at the bus stop, I felt so bad about it, because I was also putting my own father's life at stake, so I don't want this feeling anymore.

### **Discussion**

One of the goals of this study was to understand if the Brazilian protean was different from the typical western protean. Furthermore, this qualitative investigation helped to understand how people from a culturally unfit country follow a protean career. The next topics will further elaborate

on the main findings, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, future research, and conclusion.

### **Main Findings**

Evidence to answer the two research questions was found and discussed. The first theme (*Values and Preferences of the Brazilian Protean*) showed that intrapersonal definitions of success were prevalent among participants. This finding is compatible with previous studies about protean careerists who look for subjective fulfillment (Volmer & Spurk, 2011; Gunasekara et al., 2021). Therefore, participants generally comply with the conceptualizations of success expected from protean professionals. However, a surprising finding uncovered on the first theme was that Brazilian protean professionals value income as a variant for success. Since they are protean professionals, it was expected that salary would not be a significant factor (McGinley, 2018). However, despite not being the most crucial aspect, ten definitions of career success in this study mentioned money as necessary. Therefore, for Brazilian protean professionals, money is secondary but still worth considering. In the present study, 70% of definitions of success had intrapersonal definitions as the most significant weight for the protean. However, only 37,5% of participants offered strictly intrapersonal definitions of success. On the other side, 29% gave purely interpersonal definitions of success. This finding evidences a tension between pursuing different types of success' outcomes. A balance between intrapersonal and interpersonal definitions of success was also found in previous studies (Benson et al., 2020).

The success definitions given by participants in the first theme connect with the cultural aspects uncovered in the second theme. An explanation is that Brazilian cultural aspects play a role in determining what success is. Since uncertainty avoidant cultures tend to define career success in both intrapersonal and interpersonal ways (Benson et al., 2020), it could explain why participants in this research gave both definitions. Most interviewees said their protean decisions considered intrinsic aspects (Gu et al., 2022). At the same time, they repeatedly mention job security and salary as necessary and sought in Brazil.



Other financial aspects uncovered in the data also explain why the country's economy goes hand in hand with the cultural dimensions. In some cases, the decision to take a non-traditional step had reasons connected with inequalities and the side effect of it - the perceived public safety in Brazil. The wealth of a country relates to the levels of individualism and collectivism (Minkov, 2018), with the belief that the richer the country, the more individual its citizens are. Being a developing country with moderate unemployment rates (Rosati, 2022) has contributed to the accentuated importance of income. Therefore, the way Brazilians think and act may be due to the financial insecurity in the country. The cultural aspect of uncertainty avoidance found in the second theme (*Brazil as a Context for Non-Western Protean Professionals*) was a barrier to following a values-driven career. Therefore, the two themes examined in the previous chapter are complementary as they jointly explain the protean careerist in Brazil.

People from Brazil do not like taking risks and value job stability (Smale et al., 2019). The country's most popular way of achieving stability is through exam-based jobs. Training courses prepare candidates for those jobs and guide people through the journey to what is considered winning the lottery. Many people study for years to fulfill this dream but the Brazilian protean professionals partially deviate from this dream. This study showed that the non-Western Brazilian protean also sees reasoning behind stability. Nonetheless, they can detach from this reasoning to achieve other goals. Many considered stability in the past but changed their mindset (hence the protean step). However, others still want to return to a more stable job if their other values are fulfilled. Thus, the protean step might have been a way to achieve an intrinsic goal, but it does not mean disregarding stability in the long run. Also, the adverse reactions from personal networks reinforced the belief that it is better to have a bad job than to have none (de Hilal, 2006). This study showed that the Brazilian protean are uncomfortable with surprises, but they can repress this cultural trait for other aspirations. Here once again, the two themes find a connection. The Brazilian protean has roots in the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and collectivism, as shown

in the second theme. Nevertheless, they can emphasize personal values and preferences when pursuing an intrinsic goal, as uncovered in the first theme.

Professionals with a proactive personality, such as the protean, engage in more career planning behaviors (Fuller & Marler, 2009). Planning behaviors were found in the narrative of other protean professionals (Crowley-Henry, 2007). Although Brazilians are known for their lack of planning (Cordeiro & Albuquerque, 2017), the protean from the country must have planned well before making an unconventional career move. For example, participants considered various options before quitting a stable job. Even when they are considered to be "crazy" for their non-traditional decisions, their craziness is within certain reasonability. Thus, the findings showed that Brazilians find a way around their culture, allowing them to follow a non-traditional career.

Brazilian protean careerists recognized the importance of the family and the impact it has had on their decisions. Interpersonal aspects and family opinions are essential in collective countries (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). While it was clear that participants value family and their opinion, those were often disregarded. Therefore, participants do not blindly choose paths because of the family, but assess intrinsically what makes sense to them.

The Brazilian Dilemma (de Hilal, 2006) can explain why protean professionals from the country are on the fence. The mix of western and non-western characteristics influences Brazilians in their careers due to the combined cultural values they were raised with. Brazilians learn in school that they are part of the Western World (Rodarte, 2018). However, most of the literature in English considers Brazil as a non-western country. Stuenkel (2011) argues that Brazil falls in between, not being western but also not in opposition to it. The lack of agreement contributes to Brazilians molding their culture and identity according to their needs. Being able to navigate different cultural values might be a strategy used by the protean Brazilian to follow their chosen career path.

The power distance dimension was not further discussed in this study. The fact that Brazil is a collective country does not get questioned, but the hierarchy in the society sometimes does.

While some authors classified Brazil as a Horizontal Collectivism (Chirkov et al., 2005), others categorize it as Vertical Horizontal (Torres & Dessen, 2008). The evidence of Power Distance was not convincing in the interviews, which suggests that relations with authorities have no or minimal effects on the Brazilian protean career path.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study explicitly adds to the protean career literature in a non-western context. Despite the increase in research about protean careers in the last few years (Hall et al., 2018), little has been carried out in South America. For this reason, this study tapped into a seldom-explored context for protean careers. It provided a better understanding of non-traditional careers in non-western contexts, proving that it is not solely a western-individualistic countries concept (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The findings indicate that cultural aspects influence following a protean career. While the Brazilian protean has similar characteristics to the typical western protean, their culture makes it more challenging to follow a career based on subjective rewards. It shows Brazilians' challenges, such as overcoming criticism and overlooking family expectations. Ultimately, this study indicates that concepts created in a narrow setting should not be universalized to other environments without further investigation. Consequently, other countries need to be added to the scope of future studies about non-traditional careers.

This study also confirmed that the definition of career success is related to cultural values (Benson et al., 2020), and also shed light on how a protean orientation can vary among individuals. One of the claims was that protean careerists should use intrapersonal outcomes definitions of success. The Brazilian protean mostly gave intrapersonal definitions of success but also set their own bar. Therefore, being protean means following one's own definitions of success instead of only complying with rigid categorizations. This research showed that other than relying purely on a scale to call someone protean (Baruch, 2014), using success definitions could help identify a protean.

Finally, it answers a call for research to explore if the culture should be considered in non-traditional careers (Baruch, 2014; Chui et al.; 2020; Hall et al., 2018). Although protean career was said to be a concept reliable across different national contexts (Hall et al., 2018), this study showed that one's cultural background changes the way one follows their professional path. With that in mind, future research can explore the concept of a protean career in dissimilar cultures. As this study has reinforced, being nurtured in specific countries shapes the way someone follows their career (Cordeiro & Albuquerque, 2017). Therefore, no standard protean should exist, and peculiarities from different countries must be considered. Otherwise, there is a risk of simplifying concepts created in a context without further investigation. The case of the non-western Brazilian protean is an example in which different aspects could be integrated into the concept. Economic aspects were stressed among participants due to the country's cultural background and economic situation. Nonetheless, that should not be a reason to describe the Brazilian protean as not protean enough. On the contrary, while they acknowledge the impact of money on career decisions, they still act based on intrinsic motivations. If anything, it indicates that the protean in Brazilian faces extra hurdles but manages to follow a non-traditional career.

### **Practical Implications**

This research uncovered how the negative opinion of others made protean careerists doubt themselves, especially when being called crazy for leaving a stable career. Family's judgments might have caused a burden on the protean even though they often disregard the opinions. Thus, the family might still have a higher impact on the decisions of the non-western Brazilian protean when compared to the western protean. The future of work might include organizations getting the family on board to ensure they will not negatively influence career decisions of the protean.

This study also underlined unique characteristics in Brazilian protean professionals, such as consideration of stability and the role of money. For example, when considering a career move, Brazilian protean are likely to choose what brings them more satisfaction but only if the income is

minimally met. Consequently, this research helps Brazilians understand that it is possible to counterbalance a protean career and cultural aspects.

Finally, the results highlight aspects that organizations and Human Resources practitioners should consider. Attracting and retaining talented professionals with non-traditional careers demands awareness of their characteristics. This research revealed the values and interests that influence protean Brazilian professionals. That knowledge can contribute to employee engagement and commitment.

### **Limitations**

Firstly, convenience sampling might have influenced the findings. Nonetheless, that was offset by the variety of participants – different states of origin, gender, professions and ages were represented. Secondly, having more people would have contributed to richer data and a more in-depth perspective. However, due to time constraints and limited resources, the number of participants was kept to 24. Thirdly, using percentage agreement instead of Cohen's kappa in the first phase of the coding process might have decreased intercoder reliability. However, this study carried several rounds of percentage agreement with 30% of the data set, more than the 10% usually deemed as enough (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Forth, the protean scale (Baruch, 2014) was translated to Portuguese but not previously validated. Despite the limitation, the back-translation method aids in ensuring higher trustworthiness (Cha et al., 2007). Additionally, the reliability test with the participants' responses showed that the instrument has internal consistency.

### **Future Research**

This research explored Brazilian protean professionals from a qualitative approach, and future research could use quantitative data to investigate further. For instance, the ways of being protean in Brazil could be connected with the different regions in large countries (da Motta & Gomes, 2022). Those variables could contribute to finding out if protean professionals' state of

origin, income and age influence values and behaviors. Furthermore, due to the significant financial difference between social layers in Brazil, it would also be interesting to see if uncertainty avoidance is more prominent among those with a more modest upbringing.

Future research can also uncover what protean means to people from different societies. Some cultures might be stricter about being self-directed and values-driven while other adapt those definitions. Therefore, combining different tools to identify someone as protean – career steps, a protean scale, definitions of success and cultural background – can inform future research to adjusting the protean concept.

Finally, future studies could investigate how protean careerists' steps are perceived by family and friends who have a traditional career mindset. That can help clarify why it is harder to choose own paths in countries where interpersonal aspects are more stressed (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018).

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to understand how people follow a protean career in a country with unfit cultural dimensions for a non-traditional career. More specifically, the focus was on the role of uncertainty avoidance and collectivism (Hofstede, 2011) in the way Brazilians shaped their protean path. The proposition was that the Brazilian culture would be a constraint of a protean career due to the specific characteristics of the country. Previous protean studies focus on people with that inclination but not on the actual behavior. This study confirmed that Brazil's protean professionals are open to change (Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007) and act on it, even against the odds. Participants moved countries, started a new degree, left an old career behind and made controversial career moves.

This research showed that participants had to counterbalance their culture to follow a protean career. While they try to please the family and consider how their moves would impact others, they decide independently when the situation asks for it. Likewise, despite uncertainty avoidance being rooted in Brazilians, they can be strategic and put their culture aside if one of

their other values (such as flexibility, work-life balance, and good mental and physical health) is compromised. Finally, money is not paramount to Brazilian protean professionals. However, they adapt the way of being protean by acknowledging the role of money in a country with a weaker economy. Taking the results together, it seems that what helps Brazilian protean professionals is being versatile about their culture.

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## Appendix A – Invitation to Participants

Hi, my name is Jessica, and for my master's thesis at the University of Twente (Netherlands), I need about 20 Brazilian participants who follow a non-traditional career. My research will be an opportunity for people in non-traditional careers to reflect on their paths. As a thank you for participating, I will raffle ONE gift card worth 300 reais among the interviewees.

But what is a non-traditional career? It is a career based on subjective goals and values. Generally, these professionals do not value the traditional definition of success – often described as high salaries and high positions.

Some examples of non-traditional careers are:

- Leaving a stable job to study (except for studying for governmental selections)
- Leaving a stable career (exam-based public careers) to follow a less stable career
- Quitting a job to start a business
- Switching to a lower-earning job because of personal values, autonomy or self-development

Do you think you fit into a non-traditional career, or do you know someone who would be suitable? Thank you for referring potential participants!

If you want to participate, please contact me by email or WhatsApp: [j.martinsdesouza@student.utwente.nl](mailto:j.martinsdesouza@student.utwente.nl) or +31626338304 Portuguese version

### [Portuguese]

Olá, meu nome é Jessica e para minha dissertação de mestrado na University of Twente (Holanda) preciso de cerca de 20 \*participantes brasileiros que se adequam a uma carreira proteana\*. Minha pesquisa será uma oportunidade de reflexão para pessoas em trajetórias profissionais não tradicionais. Como agradecimento pela participação, sortearéi **UM** vale-presente no valor de 300 reais entre os entrevistados.

Mas o que é uma carreira proteana? \*É um tipo de carreira não tradicional baseada em objetivos e valores subjetivos e auto conduzida\*. Geralmente, esses profissionais não consideram apenas a definição tradicional de sucesso – geralmente entendida como salário e cargo altos.

\*Alguns exemplos de carreira não tradicional são\*:

- Sair de um emprego concursado para seguir um emprego menos estável
- Sair de um emprego estável (concursado ou não) para estudar (outra graduação, curso, pós ou mestrado)
- Sair de um emprego (concursado ou não) para empreender
- Mudar para um emprego ganhando menos por conta de valores pessoais, autonomia ou para autodesenvolvimento

Você acha que se encaixa em uma carreira não tradicional ou conhece alguém que seria adequado? Agradeço a indicação de possíveis participantes! Se você quiser participar, por favor entre em contato por e-mail ou WhatsApp: [j.martinsdesouza@student.utwente.nl](mailto:j.martinsdesouza@student.utwente.nl) ou +31626338304

## Appendix B – Screening with Protean Scale

In a scale from 1 (Completely disagree) to 7 (Completely Agree), how much do you agree with the following statements?

1. For me, career success is how I am doing against my goals and values
2. I navigate my own career, mostly according to my plans
3. If I have to find a new job, it would be easy
4. I am in charge of my own career
5. I take responsibility for my own development
6. Freedom and autonomy are driving forces in my career
7. For me, career success means having flexibility in my job

### [Portuguese]

1. Para mim, sucesso na carreira é como eu estou em relação aos meus objetivos e valores.
2. Eu conduzo minha própria carreira, geralmente de acordo com os meus planos
3. Se eu tivesse que encontrar um novo emprego, seria fácil
4. Eu sou responsável pela minha própria carreira
5. Eu me responsabilizo por meu próprio desenvolvimento
6. Liberdade e autonomia são forças condutoras na minha carreira
7. Para mim, sucesso profissional significa ter flexibilidade no meu trabalho

## Appendix C – Interview Guide

Name:

Age:

Time of professional experience:

Highest Education:

Degree:

State and city you are from:

Current Residency:

Current occupation:

### Opening question

1. Tell me about your career since you started working or studying until nowadays. Feel free to highlight the moments you think are more important

### Their values

2. What do you value more in a career and what are your goals?

3. What are your personal and professional values? Can you identify where they come from?

### Their careers

4. How do you think your career is different from those of others?

5. What made you not to choose a traditional career?

6. Are you happy with your career? Why?

7. Do you consider yourself professionally successful? Why?

8. What aspects do you consider essential when making your career decisions?

9. What are your career plans?

10. How would you, in a few sentences, describe “career success”?

### Their contexts and culture

11. What do you think people in professional and personal contexts expect from you in your career?

12. Do you identify with Brazilian values and culture (ex.: collectivism, avoiding uncertainty and accepting hierarchy)? Which ones?

13. How does your career style fit the culture you come from? Has the national culture in Brazil have helped or hindered your career at any point?

14. Have you taken steps in your career that conflicted with the Brazilian national culture?

### Others

15. Have you identified any strategy you use to follow a non-traditional career?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add about your values, career or culture?

## [Portuguese]

### Pergunta de abertura

1. Me conte sua trajetória profissional desde quando você começou a trabalhar até atualmente. Sinta-se a vontade para destacar os momentos que você acha mais importantes.

### Seus valores

2. O que você valoriza mais em uma carreira e quais são seus objetivos?

3. Quais são seus valores pessoais e profissionais? Você consegue identificar de onde eles vêm (família, cultura, amigos, experiências)?

### Sua carreira

4. Como você acha que sua carreira é diferente da dos outros?

5. O que fez você não seguir uma carreira tradicional?

6. Você está feliz com sua carreira? Por quê?

7. Você se considera profissionalmente bem-sucedido? Por quê?

8. Quais aspectos você considera essenciais na hora de tomar suas decisões de carreira?
9. Quais são seus planos de carreira?
10. Como você descreveria, em poucas frases, “sucesso profissional”?

**Seu contexto e cultura**

11. O que você acha que as pessoas em contextos profissionais e pessoais esperam de você em sua carreira?
12. Você se identifica com os valores e a cultura brasileira (ex.: coletivismo, evitando a incerteza e aceitando a hierarquia)? Quais?
13. Como seu estilo de carreira se encaixa na cultura de onde você vem? A cultura nacional no Brasil ajudou ou prejudicou sua carreira em algum momento?
14. Em sua carreira, você deu passos conflitantes com a cultura nacional brasileira?

**Outros**

15. Você identificou alguma estratégia que utiliza para seguir uma carreira não tradicional?
16. Há mais alguma coisa que você gostaria de acrescentar sobre seus valores, carreira ou cultura?

## Appendix D – Participants' Success Definitions

**Table 5: Participants success definitions**

Quadrant	Definition	Sample comment
<b>- Performance and Advancement</b> O1 (5 comments)	3– Money <i>Success is demonstrated by making a lot of money</i>	I believe that is when you have a good quality of life, right? You have a good, good, good quality of life. We work to get possessions, you know? Get my house, get my car, get my furniture, you know? (P19)  For me being successful is this: It is to be able to choose, to be able to choose and for that money is necessary for you to maintain yourself and for you to have this freedom to choose totally, you have to have a financial base that will allow you to make these movements without you having to go through any need (P13)
	4 – Recognition <i>Success is being recognized by others, formally or informally, for accomplishments at work</i>	It is you feeling accomplished and recognized. It's you being recognized and what you do, actually change someone's life or add to someone's life (P6)  It is to have a recognition of what you dedicate yourself to doing (P7)
	5- <b>Social status and respect:</b> <i>success is being held in high regard by others and being seen as a role model</i>	Professional success today is to work in a big company. I'm really looking for a company of this top, of this level, right? for me when I get to a company like this, I'm going to give... Now I am satisfied, right? (P14)
<b>Self-development and creativity</b> O2 - (6 comments, 2 including money)	10 - Doing what you love <i>Success is the opportunity to do work that one enjoys and is passionate about</i>	It is to work with what you like and be able to get paid for what you do (P12).  It is being able to be free to do what you want to do, without judgment from people, you know? And you are able to do what you love, regardless of what it is, regardless of whether it generates income or not, regardless of whether it is seen as successful in the eyes of others or not, I think the most important thing is that you are doing what you love (P22)  I think it is to be working in something that you like a lot. and that pays you... not logically what you want. But something that pays within the position, something that gives you a quiet life. (P28) I think professional success is you being happy where you are, doing what you like and having a healthy life. You have room for a healthy life, which is you have room for family, you have money. (P11)
	6 – Achieving personal goals <i>Success is an ongoing process of setting and achieving well defined long-term and short-term goals.</i>	When I get a job the way I want and start to take more solid steps towards my own family and such, for me it is professional success (P20)
	13 - Personal growth and development <i>Success is a process of continuous development and learning in order to reach the full potential of one's human capital and innate abilities.</i>	It is the possibility for me to be in an environment that allows me to explore areas that I don't know yet, but that gives me the possibility to try, to do my best, to try to learn a skill (P17)
<b>Satisfaction and security</b> O3 - (11 comments, 6 including money)	17 - Personal fulfillment  <i>Success is doing work that one feels is meaningful and that makes one feel happy and satisfied</i>	I think it is what you are doing, that you feel well accomplished and at the same time, you are well paid, because if not, there is no point (P30)  It is to be working on something that makes you feel good, that's my current definition (P1) Waking up happy, knowing I'm going to work, spending the day at work happy and, at the end of the month, being well paid for what I did (P2)  I think there are two factors that, combined, create perfection. It is to be satisfied, right? Being happy with what you do and being well paid. When you have these two here, you got there, you got where you wanted to be (P4)  I think it is when you are satisfied with what you set out to do (P8)
	18 - Work/life balance <i>Success is being able to balance work demands with one's personal life and family time.</i>	I think being happy, satisfied with what you do, with life in general, because the job takes most of the time of adult life, so being...to be happy in life, you have to be happy in your job (P24)  I think it is satisfaction...and...I don't know if it's a financial peace of mind, something like that (P29)  I think professional success is doing something that makes you happy. That makes you feel good, that you go to work as if you were going to a party. And that combined with being well paid too, because you can do that and not have a salary that pays your bills. So I think these 2 things are linked, they are so together (P21)
		Professional success is to be able to balance your personal life with your main activity and be well paid for it, and that provides you with a comfortable life? (P23)  It is to take a trip and be able to be at peace, you know, without having to be killing yourself working 10 hours, 12 hours, not working a healthy amount of hours and also being able to dedicate time for home and family and friends (P27)  It is when I have good mental health and work does not drain me, work is an important part of my life, but it is not my life, right? So, yes, for me it is a synonym of being successful. (P16)

**Cooperation and  
contribution**  
 Q4-  
 (2 comments)

22 - Doing good for others at work  
*Success is the feeling that one is helping colleagues, developing others, and/or being a good teammate.*

It is to have as balanced a balance as possible between giving and receiving (P3)

23 - Doing good for society:  
*success is the feeling that one is making a positive contribution to the profession, society, or larger world.*

To me, professional success is having a purpose, working with passion, working on something that you know you are making a difference and that is very important both to you and to the world, contributing some seeds with something that you will leave as your legacy (P31)

Note. Cells in grey highlights definitions that mentioned money as a variable for career success. Based on 24 definitions from Benson et al. (2020)