



Career Plateau- A Literature Review

Satuluri Padma

Joginpally BR Engineering College, Hyderabad, India

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Abstract

Career plateau is a stage at which employees find less chance for upward mobility and lose interest in their job that they perform. It is a very harmful situation to all organizations when they identify sudden dip in the performance of senior and potential employees. Organizations need to identify the symptoms quickly and take steps to boost their morale and performance. The present study is a literature review which covers classification, factors influencing, causes and symptoms of career plateau and strategies to prevent plateaued conditions in the organizations.

Key Words: Career Plateau, Job Satisfaction, Commitment, Stress & Burnout and Mentoring

JEL Classification: M12

Paper Classification: Literature Review

Introduction

Career Plateau is term that attracted many researchers. It is defined as the stage at which employees find low chances for upward mobility, no interest in the present job and very long time gap between promotions. Employees perform the same job for many years that causes boredom, dissatisfaction, stress and burnout. The plateaued situation is not at all good for any organization where employees show less commitment and low job performance. Hence organizations have to plan for training programs to enhance employee skill sets, plan mentoring programs to give moral support and identify the strategies to enhance employee involvement in decision making process.

Literature Review

The researcher reviewed various articles to understand the topic career plateau, its types, causes and factors influencing career plateau, symptoms and consequences of career plateau and the strategies to overcome this.

Daniel C Feldman and Barton A Weitz (1988) in their article on "Career Plateau reconsidered" identified the individual, job related and organizational factors that influence career plateau. They discussed various definitions of career plateau as employees having a long gap between the promotions or low likelihood of receiving further job assignments. They identified the sources



of career plateau as individual skills and abilities, individual needs and values, lack of intrinsic motivation, lack of extrinsic rewards, stress and burnout and slow organizational growth.

Daniel C Feldman and Barton A. Weitz (1988) have made a study on sales force to understand the reasons for career plateau blockages and help for professional growth and development. The study identified the following reasons for plateau blockages in sales force job (a) lack of proper training to handle a new job (b) when additional responsibilities are not in line with the present responsibilities (c) role perceptions like role ambiguity, role overload, stress and burnout. The following measures are suggested for the professional growth and development of sales force. 1) Developing appropriate skills for promotion through training programs. 2) Redesigning the jobs to enhance intrinsic motivation. 3) Modifying compensation and promotional policies to increase extrinsic motivation. 4) Conduct programs to reduce job stress and burnout and 5) Offer dual career ladders by matching career anchors to different organizational career paths.

Andreas G M Nachbagauer and Gabriela Riedl (2002) have made a study on effect of career plateau on performance, work satisfaction and commitment on university staff and school teachers. The results found that the outcome variables i.e performance, work satisfaction and commitment are not connected with position immobility. The extended working periods at the same position have harmful effect on work outcomes. Advances in work responsibilities moderates negative effects of low expectation on promotions.

Patrick Chang Boon Lee (2003) has made an empirical study on professional career plateau and work outcomes in Singapore. The study emphasized that professional plateau (a stage where promotional and professional growth opportunities are low) accounts for three work outcomes namely career satisfaction, job satisfaction and turnover intention. The study results showed that professional plateau is negatively related to career satisfaction and job satisfaction and positively related to turnover intention. The study also revealed that age and job tenure are also not related to career plateau. Hence age and job tenure may not influence career plateau of the employees in the organizations.

Benjamin P Foster et al., (2004) have made a study to examine the effect of mentoring on turnover intentions and career plateau tendencies. The samples are drawn from Canadian Certified Management Accountants and the study results proved that mentoring reduces significantly the tendencies of career plateau and also lowers turnover intentions of the accountants. Mentoring was directly correlated with job satisfaction. Mentoring activities enhance work experience of professionals and reduce turnover intentions which in turn reduce career plateauing conditions.

Heslin (2005) has explained two types of plateaus. Underemployed people perform those jobs which requires less qualifications and experience that they possess. Unable to get full time and regular jobs may force the employees to continue in the same job. The job conditions like downsizing and out sourcing, people have less chances of getting promoted which is known as hierarchical plateau. Some other people may need to perform same job repeatedly for many number of years which is known as job content plateau. Due to flat organizational structure, the chances of increased job responsibilities are very less. They perform the same job uninterestingly because of family responsibilities and less job opportunities available outside their organization.

Mat Sani H et al., (2006) have made a study on administrative and diplomatic officers in Malaysia to find moderating role of job performance on the relationship between work outcomes and career plateau. Job performance moderates work outcome variables like job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to quit with career plateau situations. The study results

found that job performance is one of the best strategies for improving plateaued employee's behavior and attitude at work place. The study also suggested the strategies to overcome career plateau are job enrichment, strategic training and retraining, job rotation and job restructuring.

Ronald J Burke and Aslaug Mikkelsen (2006) have made a study on police personnel who have 15 or more years of experience and got promotions with those police personnel of 15 or more years of experience and did not get promotions. Plateaued police personnel are younger and have more educational qualifications than non-plateaued police personnel. Plateaued police officers have less favorable work environment and cynicism than non-plateaued police officers. But both the groups of police officers have similar psychological health conditions.

Henry Ongori and Joseph E Agolla (2009) have made a study on managing career plateau in organizations and the strategies to minimize employee intention to quit. The causes identified for the career plateau are employees may need to work in the same position for a long period of time due to business reengineering and downsizing. The antecedent conditions like inappropriate skills and abilities, slower organizational growth may be the reasons for not getting promotional opportunities. Career plateau may lead to late coming to organization and early leaving of the organization, absenteeism and non involvement in the organizational activities. The job rotation, training program on skill enhancement, proper counseling and mentoring are the strategies to be adopted to handle the plateaued employees.

Samuel O Salami (2010) has made a study on career plateauing and work attitudes, the role of mentoring with Nigerian employees. The study results found that there is a negative correlation between career plateau and employee job satisfaction & organizational commitment. There is a positive correlation between career plateau and employee turnover intention. The multiple regression analysis results found that mentoring plays a significant moderating effect on the relation between career plateau and job satisfaction & turnover intention of Nigerian employees.

Benjamin P Foster et al., (2011) examined whether effect of mentoring on career plateau and turnover tendencies differ with gender and whether gender has any role in differences in compensations. The results of the study showed that mentoring helped both male and female to advance in promotions and in their job performance levels. Though mentoring is helping to fill the pay gap, but it alone may not be sufficient to fill the pay gap in the organization. The job performances of male and female employees enhances because of mentoring though female employees receive less pay than male counterparts.

Carrie S. Hurst et al., (2012) have compared plateaued and non-plateaued employees to find the relationship between plateau and stress and organizational citizenship behaviour. The study results found that there is positive correlation between stress and career plateau and negative correlation between career plateau and organizational citizenship behaviour. The study also highlighted that non-plateaued employees are using more non-work coping strategies than plateaued employees. Job involvement and non work coping strategies are associated with low stress. The study also found that hierarchical plateau is more stressful than job content plateau.

Godday Orziemgbe Oriarewo et al., (2013) have made a study on the factors influencing plateauing conditions in knowledge workers and the relation between entrepreneurial success and types of plateauing in knowledge workers. The results of the study found that reduced organizational hierarchies, less promotional opportunities and fewer competition positions are the factors that influence career plateau of knowledge workers. Entrepreneurial success has significant

negative relationship with types of plateauing i.e organizational plateauing, professional plateauing, structural plateauing, content plateauing, life plateauing and contribution plateauing.

Malikesh Beheshtifar and Hamide Modaber (2013) have made a study on relation between occupational stress and career plateau in Kerman branch of Azad University, Iran. The study results revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between occupational stress and career plateau. The two variables of occupational stress namely role insufficiency and role boundary have more impact on career plateau of the employees. The negative effect of occupational stress that leads to career plateau includes reduction in employee performance, absenteeism and turnover intention.

Shahzad Aziz Choudary and Muhammad Ramzan(2013) have made a study on three downsized organizations of Pakistan to find which type of plateau prevail in downsized organizations and what are the strategies adopted by organizations to deal with career plateau. The study analysis shows that organizational strategies have impact on the perception of employees on their plateau. Job enrichment and Mentoring has significant negative impact on career plateau. Mentoring is considered as a better strategy than job enrichment to handle career plateaus of the organizations.

Shon Miles et al., (2013) have made a study to find the relation between job satisfaction, perceived plateau and promotability in television media organizations. Their study revealed that variability of job content career plateau was explained by job satisfaction score. The study has also found that there exists a relationship between employee perceived promotion and job satisfaction. Job enrichment plays a crucial role in motivating the employee to perform wide range of job responsibilities which reduces job content plateau conditions.

Zakaria Sorizehi et al., (2013) have conducted a study to find the relation between career plateau and personnel burnout of Health Center Ministry of Khash city with sample of 227 staff members. The correlation results of the study revealed that career burnout increases with the increase in career plateau score. That means there is a significant positive correlation between three components of career plateau i.e structural, content and life career plateaus and burnout of the personnel.

Khatijah Omar et al., (2014) have made a study on nurses in Malaysian Public Hospitals to investigate the relationship between hierarchical plateauing and the intention to leave. The correlation results of the study proved that Hierarchical career plateau has failed to demonstrate the significant relation with intention to leave the organization among the nurses of Malaysian public hospitals. The study results show that the nurses who are working in the same position for more than five years are experiencing hierarchical career plateau and the results highlighted that as long as employees are fairly paid the salaries and the benefits to their satisfaction level, they do not face the plateaued conditions.

Bancy Ngondi Wawira et al., (2015) have made a study on Murang's County Government to examine the effect of lack of skills on career stagnation, the effect of innovative climate and career stagnation, the effect of stress level and career stagnation and lack of motivation and career stagnation. The findings of the study show that strong positive correlation exists between lack of motivation and career stagnation. Strong motivation leads to career advancement. Innovative climate enhance career advancement, positive correlation exist between career stagnation and job stress. Lack of skill and career stagnation has positive correlation that means skill enhancement will help the employees to progress in their career.

Golbahar Samiei and Addel Salavati(2015) have made a study on knowledge management and three types of career plateau namely structural plateau, content plateau and life plateaus on employees of Insurance companies located in Sanandaj city of Iran. The results of the study revealed that there is a negative correlation between knowledge management and three types of career plateau. It means that career plateau increases with the decrease in knowledge management. Hence every organization has to take steps to enhance knowledge, store it, distribute it and in sharing the knowledge to reduce career plateau of the employees.

Hassan Alivand and Habib Ebrahimpour (2015) have made a study on effects of career plateau on the desire to develop a career in professional development in Sepah bank of Ardabil province. They have considered three types of career plateau namely personal career plateau, structural career plateau and content career plateau for the study. The study results found that significant negative correlation exists between desire to develop a professional career and three types of career plateau namely career plateau, structural career plateau and content career plateau.

Malikeh Beheshtifar et al., (2015) have made a study on relation between career plateau and employees' work attitudes. The study results show that some jobs in the organization are at a risk of occupational plateau. Hence the organization has to identify such jobs and plan training and other programs in order to reduce the occupational plateau. There is an inverse relation between occupational plateau and work attitudes. The following strategies are identified by the authors to handle plateaued conditions. 1. Identifying those factors that are causing occupational plateau and try to control them and 2. Identify those factors that enhance work attitudes and plan the programs to improvise them. Training programs on time management and stress management will help the organization to handle plateaus in the organization.

Ritu Gandhi Arora and Savita (2015) have made a literature survey to understand the impact of career plateau and job satisfaction of employees and examined the reasons for career plateau. Very few studies are identified to study the effect of career plateau on job satisfaction of employees. The study found that plateau conditions are disadvantageous to work conditions as it effects job performance, job satisfaction and enhances job stress and burnout and turnover intentions.

Gholamali Tabarsa and Arezoo Jamali Nazari (2016) have examined the role of mentoring in content plateauing and job satisfaction and willingness to leave the organization in Iran ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade. The study results found the significant moderating role of mentoring on the relationship between job satisfaction and content plateau. Mentoring played a moderating role in the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. It is observed in the study that the employees who have experienced high mentoring, the content plateau has no significant effect on their job satisfaction where as employees who experienced lower mentoring find effect of career plateau on job satisfaction.

Ihua-Jonathan Nwovuhoma and Malik, Achama Comfort (2016) have made a study to understand the causes of career plateau in secondary school teachers of Rivers State and find that lack of opportunities for promotion, lack of opportunities for transfers, discrimination due to race and stress at job are the main causes of career plateau of teachers working in urban places of Rivers state, repetitive and monotonous job, lack of recognition, employees' own perception of their job and lack of management support are the causes of career plateau of secondary school teachers who are working in rural areas of Rivers state. Depression, lack of motivation, low involvement in the job and increased absenteeism are effects of career plateau in their schools.

Kemo Badiane (2016) has examined the relationship among career plateau and organizational commitment and organizational citizenship on Taiwan based expatriates. The study results found that career plateauing has significant negative correlation with affective organizational commitment. Career plateauing has not significantly correlated with organizational citizenship. The findings of the study are more useful at individual and organizational level. Most of the expatriates of Taiwan felt that they face role ambiguity. Those expatriates who experience hierarchical plateau may face lower organizational commitment.

Nath M. Abraham et al., (2016) have made a study on secondary school teachers to explore the causes and influence of career plateau on individuals. The results of the study found that lack of individual skills and abilities, lack of stability in the job, reduced organizational hierarchy and slow company growth are the causes that influence career plateau. Employee intention to leave, absenteeism, less commitment to work, stress and burnout are the consequences of career plateau in the organization. The study made recommendation to adopt appropriate intervention to manage career plateau situations of the organization.

Zhou Jiang (2016) has made a study to understand the relation between career adaptability and job content plateau with the mediating role of person job fit and person organization fit. The study results revealed that the people who have high career adaptability, experienced less job content career plateau which means that there is a negative correlation between job content plateau and career adaptability. Person job fit and person organization fit have played a partial mediating role in the relationship between career adaptability and job content plateau.

Essomme Innocent et al., (2017) have made a study in Cameroon's large enterprises to understand the relation between diverse managerial variables such as job enrichment, participation in decision making and support from superiors and career ceiling of employees. From the observations of the study, it is understood that there is no relation between support from superiors and career plateau and job enrichment and career plateau. Significant relationship is identified between involvement in decision making and career plateau. Hence they identified the need for involvement of the personnel in decision making helps to reduce career plateau conditions.

Naveed Farooq and Muhammad Tufail(2017) have made a study to find the effect of career plateau on Job performance and organizational commitment in private universities located in Peshawar city. The results found that career plateau has negative relationship with job performance and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment plays a mediating role between career plateau and job performance. The low chances of promotion and job uncertainty may lead to lower organizational commitment and job performance. Hence the study has suggested developing a promotional policy suitable to enhance organizational commitment and job performance.

Shakila Devi and Rabiyyathul Basaria (2017) have made an attempt to find the causes of career plateau and mentioned that there are two types of plateaus namely structural and personal plateaus. Structural plateau exists when organizations feel that individual employees, who are lacking managerial skills, may not be suitable for higher level positions and sometimes organization may also feel that an individual may not have suitable commitment for organizational development. Flattened organization structure may be the other reason which screens out many people leaving them in plateau situation. The authors have identified that some employees get plateaued conditions due to personal reasons like increased responsibilities at home front, health problems and hence they try to distance themselves from work and involve more in non work activities.

Conclusion

There are different opinions on classifications of career plateau. But mainly it is classified as hierarchical career plateau and content career plateau. Role ambiguity, role overload, stress, burnout and psychological unhealthiness etc are the symptoms of career plateau. Reduced Job satisfaction career satisfaction and low employee commitment, decreased job and professional performances, increased turnover intentions are some of the consequences of career plateau. Mentoring is one of the strategies that help to prevent plateaued conditions and boosts morale of the employees. Training programs on time management and stress management help the employees to control their stress and burnout. The potential employees, who are in the plateaued conditions, need to be actively involved in the decision making of the organization. This gives an impression to them that their organization is giving importance which in turn motivates them and boosts their job and career performance.

Directions for future research

1. The literature review gave a clear idea on reasons for career plateau in some occupations like sales force, police personnel, nurses and accountants etc only. The study may be extended by finding the reasons of career plateau in other occupations like doctors, academicians, entrepreneurs and engineers etc too.
2. The studies on career plateau are more in the countries like USA, UK, Malaysia and Kenya etc and found fewer studies in India. Hence there is a need to conduct the studies on career plateau in Indian context.
3. Most of the studies are conducted on government and public sector organizations and few studies are conducted on private sector and multinational companies.
4. There is a need to develop a model on career plateau, its consequences and strategies to prevent it.

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Author's Profile

Satuluri Padma is presently working as HOD of MBA Department in Joginpally BR Engineering College, Hyderabad, India. She has more than 16 years of experience in teaching MBA students and published eight papers in National Journals and two papers in International Journals. She presented papers in various national and international conferences.
