

## Career Plateau Phase and Intention to Quit Behaviour of Employees – A view point

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study investigates if employee is in Career Plateau phase, it focuses on identifying which type of Career Plateau an employee is undergoing. It also investigates the relationship between Career Plateau and intention to quit behaviour of an employee working in various organizations. Data were collected from 34 employees working in wide variety of organizations across India through a structured questionnaire and Non-Probability, Convenience Sampling was used. Results of this study showed that Career Plateau have a great impact towards employees as well the organization. Some employees are undergoing Content Plateau, but very few are experiencing Structural Plateau. There exists a positive relationship between Career Plateau and intention to quit behaviour of employee working in various organizations. There are various causes behind Career Plateau which leads to intention to quit behaviour of employee. Hence, various types of Career Plateau impact the intention to quit behaviour of employee to a great extent. Based on the findings, direction for future research are also discussed.

**Key words:** Career plateau, Structural Plateau, Content Plateau, Intention to Quit, Employee Turnover

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### **1. Introduction**

The concept of career plateau originated more than two decades ago. Career plateau can be defined as a point where the employee's likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very low as per Ference et al (1977) who were among the earlier researchers. Many employees "stuck" at some point in their career where moving upwards seems to stop altogether. Such a situation can be determined as to be "Career Plateau." It is a point in the career of an employee where the possibility of vertical promotion within the official hierarchy becomes very low or absent altogether. Employees are important assets of an organization. Most of the employees reach a career plateau before attaining their career goals. Nowadays, Career Plateau is becoming widespread in many organizations due to flatter organization structure. Career Plateau is a point where progression seems to be difficult due to both internal as well as external reasons. Internal reasons for reaching a career plateau may be lack of confidence, some people feel no more challenged or excited by their work. External reasons for reaching a career plateau can include reaching a specific level of seniority at organization. It is generally an issue faced by the employees wherein they feel that they are not progressing, their life has become stable and their future is ambiguous. One of the biggest challenges of plateauing is that employees may not be aware of the problem they are facing, hence it makes it difficult for the HR to identify the issue behind such behaviour of employees.

There are two types of Career Plateau: Organizational Career Plateau and Personal Career Plateau. Organizational Career Plateau can further be classified as: Structural and Content. Structural Career Plateau can be defined as a point where organization structure prevents an employee from moving upwards in the hierarchy. It results from the end of promotional opportunities due to flattening structures in the organization. Content Career Plateau is experienced when an employee knows the job well and finds no variety and challenge in the job. Employee is no longer interested in taking on greater responsibilities or transferring to another department. Personal plateau is caused when employee's ability do not match the job requirements or employee's lack motivation or career aspirations as per Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006.

People respond to career plateaus in different ways. General reactions include:

- ◆ Feeling angry, bored and feeling frustrated
- ◆ Losing interest in work
- ◆ Blaming the Organization for such behaviour of individual
- ◆ Thinking to quit from the organization
- ◆ Accepting the plateau and using it as a motivator for change

As per Gunz, 1989 employees who have attained plateau have a higher degree of intention to quit due to reduced opportunities in the present organization. Many studies have been conducted to identify the intention to leave of an employee and factors relating to intention to leave in various fields. As per Ongori, there is still no particular reason why employees leave an organization, but few reasons have been identified which determines employee's intention to leave in the organization.

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Sometimes, Career Plateau forces the employee's to leave the organization. Various causes and effects are related to Labour Turnover. It is important to identify the factors that make an employee intends to leave the organization. Various studies have revealed that various factors contribute to an employee's intention to leave such as personal factors, job related factors, organizational factors and environmental factors. Labour Turnover may fall in three different areas namely individual, organizational and environmental characteristics. Individual characteristics may include marital status or gender that may influence turnover intentions. In addition to this, organizational characteristics refer to the interface between individual workers and organizations (e.g. Bauer et al, 2006). Environmental characteristics are those that affect the organization as a whole and the ease of movement an individual has between organizations.

Therefore, this paper tries to investigate if employee is in career plateau phase, it focuses on identifying which type of career plateau an employee is undergoing. This paper also tries to examine the drivers and effects of career plateau in organisation and analyse various causes of employee's intention to quit.

### **2. Objectives of this Study**

1. To identify if employee is in Career Plateau phase.
2. To find which type of Career Plateau an employee is undergoing.
3. To investigate the relationship between Career Plateau and Intention to Quit behaviour of an employee.

### **3. Scope**

The scope is extended to every employee's working in different industries. The study focuses on various factors for Career plateau and to investigate the relationship between Career Plateau and Intention to Quit behaviour of an employee. Research Design used was Descriptive and sample was collected from 34 employees working in various organizations across India

### **4. Hypothesis Testing**

H<sub>0</sub>: Intention to Quit is not significantly dependent on Content and Structural Plateau.

H<sub>1</sub>: Intention to Quit is significantly dependent on Content and Structural Plateau.

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### **5. Literature Review**

**Godday Orziemgbe Oriarewo, Kenneth Chukwujioke Agbim & Michael Owoicho, University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Nigeria** have researched on the topic “**Entrepreneurial Success, Knowledge Workers Plateauing and Turnover: The Impact of Relatedness**” in June 2013 with the Journal name as International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Volume 3, Issue 6.

This paper focuses on that employees are plateaued by factors such as reduced organizational hierarchies, reduced promotion opportunities and fewer competitive positions. The identified types of knowledge worker plateauing that negatively affects entrepreneurial success of the entrepreneurs/employers are lack of job openings (organizational plateauing), unchallenging jobs combined with few opportunities for professional development that enhances future employability (professional plateauing), a feeling of being unsuccessful on the job (life plateauing) and limited opportunities to develop competencies and to add value (contribution plateauing). The sample size for this study is made up of 1,640 respondents.

The findings showed that employees quit their job because of lack of recognition and competitive reward system, inadequate training and development opportunities, and managerial/leadership style. Further it is found that Managers should use the flat rather than the tall structure system so as to make lower cadre workers to take more responsibilities thereby reducing the degree of plateauing and turnover. Business enterprises should adopt a management/leadership style that creates a more friendly relationship between managers and other workers.

**Henry Ongori and Joseph E. Agolla, University of Botswana, Department of Management, Gaborone** have researched in the year 2009 on the topic “**Paradigm Shift in Managing Career Plateau in Organisation: The Best Strategy to Minimize Employee Intention to Quit**” with the Journal name as African Journal of Business Management, Volume 3, Issue 6.

The paper highlights on the best strategy which can be implemented to reduce the employee's intention to quit the organization and to manage career plateau in organization. The major finding is that career plateau is a major contributing factor to employee turnover in organization. This paper tell us about the main causes of career plateau like Business Re-engineering, Downsizing, Spin-off-activity, Inappropriate abilities and skills, Low need for career mobility, Slow company growth and Other factors like age, organizational needs. The effects of career plateau could lead to work stress, less job satisfaction .grater work alienation and greater intention to quit.

Job Rotation can be implement to improve employees skill set and reduce the degree of boredom which will eventually help to reduce career plateau. Management should implement flatter structure, which will make lower cadre employees to take more responsibilities.

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Employees should be appraised objectively and should be given feedback in a time frame. Management should provide counselling and mentoring to reduce personal career plateau. Management should understand the signs of career plateau.

Eg. Employees coming late, leaving early, changes in personality such as irritability, hypersensitivity to criticism Management should create environment whereby employees are allowed to further their careers. Other than any effects of career plateau, intention to quit is most serious one. So implementing strategies at right time to reduce plateau is more important.

**Khatijah Omar, Marhana Mohamed Anuar, Ahmad Munir Mohd Salleh and Azizul Yadi Yaakop, University Malaysia Terengganu(UMT), Malaysia** have researched in the year 2014 on the topic “**Career Plateauing: Is it Still A Matter of Concern?**” with the Journal name as Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, Vol 5, No 7.

The Objective of the research paper is to investigate the relationship between hierarchical plateauing and the intention to leave among nurses in Malaysian public hospitals.

A survey was conducted where questionnaires were distributed to 700 nurses in 11 public hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia. In Malaysia, nurses are categorized into four main groups: matron, sister, staff nurse, and community nurse. The survey questions were divided into three major sections. Section A focussed on personal information details of respondents, Section B contained questions about the respondent’s perceived hierarchical plateauing and Section C contained questions about the respondent’s perceived intention to leave.

The findings were that the influence of plateauing on the intention to leave in today’s job market is not that significant, there are other factors that influence the intention to leave more than career plateauing.

It was concluded that there exist an insignificant relationship between hierarchical plateauing and the intention to leave.

Hence, the issue of career plateauing is not new and continues to be a pertinent issue in many organizations and industries. So plateauing is no longer a major factor that contributes an intention to leave.

**Marka. Bhavani, Research Scholar, School of Management Studies, Hyderabad and Dr. Varanasi Madhusudhan Prasad, Professor & Chairmen BoS, School of Management Studies, Hyderabad** have researched in the year 2013 on the topic “**An Empirical Study of Organizational Climate and Career Plateau Causes and Effects of Enterprises in India**” with the Journal name as IOSR Journal of Business and Management, Volume 9, Issue 6

This paper examines the effects of career plateau on the employee’s job satisfaction organizational commitment and intention to quit. The career plateau is divided into three broad categories: individual, familial and organizational factors. Individuals are linked to the specific

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situations such as age, tenure, and focus of control, education level, a lack of skills or ambition etc. Familial set of factors includes family satisfaction, family scale, family load, the spouse's type of work etc and organizational factors involves structural characteristics and career path.

The survey is conducted on 283 people from enterprises and MBA Classes. The Study carried out using self administered survey based approach and Data Collection made through electronically through e-mails, online questionnaire was developed and the link to the on-line survey distributed via. E-mail.

This study aimed to examine the causes and effects of career plateau, and obtained some meaningful results. It quoted out that the two dimensions of career plateau both can decrease the employee's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and increase turnover intentions. The most important finding was that job content plateau has dominant effect on work attitudes comparative to hierarchical plateau. Continuous development of new skills, more on-job training opportunities for employees and life-long learning has been identified as the strategies to reduce career plateau. Further the study confirmed that, job tenure and career path have significant effects on career plateau. But gender, age, educational level and seniority have no significant effects on career plateau.

**Mat Sani Hassan, Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority, Maimunah Ismail and Jegak Uli, University Putra, Malaysia** have researched on the topic **“Moderating Role of Job Performance on Relationship between Career Plateauing and work outcomes among Administrative and Diplomatic Officers in Malaysia”**

Job Performance moderates almost all outcome variables that consist of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to quit. This research paper says that subjective career plateau will be negatively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement. Whereas Career Plateau is positively related to intention to quit variable. Job content plateaued employees reported lower levels of job satisfaction and greater intentions to turnover. There is positive relationship between job performance and organizational commitment. Intention to quit was found as one of the main effects of career plateau. Further the paper talks about different strategies to reduce career plateau such as job rotation, strategic training and retaining, job restructuring and other job enrichment initiatives. A survey was conducted on 137 Administrative & diplomatic officers.

The findings showed that Plateau can be positive if it is combined with reassurance about individual accomplishments. This can be used to differentiate between plateaued and permanently stalled employees. The first one can resume in terms of job performance while the latter is subjected to other options such as job retirement. It is stated that there should be system of providing employees with regular or participative performance evaluations to motivate the plateaued employees.

**James W Clark** have researched in the year 2004 on the topic **“Marketing Management Implications of Career Plateauing”** with the Journal Name as Problems and Perspectives in Management.

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This Research Paper defines Career Plateauing in several ways and various steps Organisations/Managers can take in order to overcome Plateau in an individual's life. Plateauism is measured by job attitudes, job performance, job satisfaction and job tenure. But it should be measured on an individual basis always.

The findings were individual are bound for Plateauism. Managers should provide self-development seminars to their employees, job skills training sessions and sometimes reward their employees which will help them in overcoming Plateau. It was concluded that organization can make career plateaus an acceptable reality in organizational life by focusing on showing appreciation for an employee's performance.

Hence, Plateauism is influenced by Personal, Organizational, and Cultural factors. Career Plateauing can have either a positive or negative impact on individual morale and organizational productivity, depending upon individual goals and circumstances.

**Hila Hofstetter, Department of Sociology, University of Haifa, Israel and Aaron Cohen, School of Political Science, University of Haifa, Israel** have researched in the year 2012 on the topic **“The Mediating Role of Job Content Plateau on the Relationship between Work Experience Characteristics and Early Retirement and Turnover Intentions”** with the Journal name as Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Vol 43, No 3.

This Research Paper highlights that when a job becomes increasingly repetitive, boring and unchallenging – the situation known as the job content plateau – the employee's motivation to continue in that job drops which results in withdrawal from work, and early retirement intentions. When employees perceive that the organisation is concerned about their welfare and appreciates their contribution, they are more likely to develop positive expectations for further development of the exchange relationship with the organisation, thereby weakening any withdrawal intentions. On the other hand, perceptions of an organisational atmosphere permeated by age stereotypes can push employees toward early retirement.

This study examines the relationships between perceived age stereotypes, and the occurrence of a job content plateau. In practice, it is probable that not only do age stereotypes in organisations reduce older workers' mobility and access to development opportunities, but they also prevent the delegation of new assignments and interesting tasks in the existing position

Finally, there is no support for assumption we that co-worker support would make a positive contribution to the employee's work experience. In fact, it appears from our findings that co-worker support cannot serve as significant compensation for an unsupportive organisational environment or a boring job .The finding shows that employees' intentions to leave the organisation are affected mainly by their relationship with the organisation.

**Benjamin P. Foster, Subhas Lonial and Trimbak Shastri, University of Louisville, USA** have researched in the year 2011 on the topic **“Mentoring, Career Plateau Tendencies, Turnover Intentions And Implications For Narrowing Pay And Position Gaps due to Gender – Structural Equations Modeling”** with the Journal name as Journal of Applied Business Research, Volume 27, Number 6.

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A Survey was conducted on experienced Canadian certified management accounts. Employee's career plateau can affect organization working unless appropriate steps are taken. Dissatisfied and frustrated employees are more likely to attain career plateau than satisfied employees. A study was done to examine the relationship between mentoring, plateaus, turnover intention, and job satisfaction.

The findings showed that mentoring reduces the higher turnover intention and career plateau tendency in an organization. Further it shows that mentoring helps psychologically to women more than men. Mentoring also has certain relationship with job satisfaction, mentoring increases job satisfaction. It helps to reduce the gap between male and female employees which sometimes exist because of their positions and helps to increase loyalty and commitment towards job. Further compensation should be given in addition to mentoring, to increase job commitment. Compensation also helps to reduce the gap between male and female.

**Samuel O. Salami** have researched on the topic “**The study on Career Plateauing and Work Attitudes: Moderating effects of Mentoring others with Nigerian Employees**” with the Journal name as Europe's Journal of Psychology, Volume 6, Number 4.

This study emphasize on explaining the relationship between Career plateauing and job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intentions. The study was carried out through a survey technique done on 280 government employees. It considers 5 hypothesis relating career plateau, Job satisfaction, organization commitment and turnover intention.

This study concluded that, there is a relationship between career plateau and work attitudes and mentoring plays as a significant moderator in relationships. The study was helpful to understand the relation between career plateau and various other factors that affect it.

**Patrick Chang Boon Lee** Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University, Nanyang, Singapore have researched in the year October 2002 on the topic “**Going Beyond Career Plateau using Professional Plateau to account for Work Outcomes**” with the Journal name as Journal of Management Development, Vol 22, No 6.

This research paper focuses to study the effects of employee work outcomes on professional plateau. It considers the hypothesis that career and job satisfaction and turnover intentions will create variance in the professional plateau. For this, a survey was conducted with 120 responses from workforce in Singapore. The data was analysed on the basis of career

plateau, job satisfaction etc. This study concluded that job tenure affects the age, career and job satisfaction. Also, Professional Plateau and Career Plateau are significantly related to the three dependent Variables. It has also helped to understand the concept of professional plateau and the dependent variables related to it.



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### **6. Research Methodology**

The present study intends to examine the type of Career Plateau phase an employee is experiencing and to check if employee is planning to leave the organization. A sample of 34 employees was surveyed through a questionnaire. The responses were taken from employees working in different organizations across India. An attempt has been made to find out the perception of employees towards career plateau and to identify the factor that leads to intention to quit behaviour of employees.

#### **Type of Research: Quantitative**

Quantitative Research: Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires and surveys or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques.

#### **Method of Research: Descriptive**

Descriptive Method: Descriptive research is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. It does answer questions about when/ why/ how the characteristics occurred.

#### **Research Instrument: Questionnaire**

Research Instrument: Research Instrument is measurement tool designed to obtain data on a topic of interest from research subjects. They include the purpose/ variable measured, sample population, methodology, other instruments, items and questions and the source for the instrument.

Questionnaire: A Questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents.

#### **Sampling Method: Non-Probability, Convenience Sampling**

Non-Probability, Convenience Sampling: Non-Probability sampling is a sampling technique where the samples are gathered in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected.

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### **Sampling Size: 34**

Sampling Size: Sampling Size determination is the act of choosing the number of observations or replicates to include in a statistical sample. The sample size is an important feature of any empirical study in which the goal is to make inferences about a population from a sample.

### **Sample Unit: Employees working in various organizations across India**

Sample Unit: Sample Unit can be defined as a single section selected to research and gather statistics of the whole.

### **Data Collection**

Data collected through structured questionnaire were presented in the form of Pie Chart and Bar Graphs.

### **Primary Data**

Primary data is information that a researcher collect specifically for the purpose of his own research project. An advantage of primary data is that it is specifically tailored the researcher's needs. A sample of 34 employees was surveyed through a pre-tested questionnaire.

### **Secondary Data**

Secondary data is information that has been collected for a purpose other than the current research project but has some relevance and utility for your research. Secondary data was collected from Research Papers, Articles, Thesis and Books.

### **Data Analysis Tool**

Data is analyzed using statistical tool SPSS Software.

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### 7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Female	6	17.6	17.6	17.6
Male	28	82.4	82.4	100.0
Total	34	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 21-30	17	50.0	50.0	50.0
31-40	15	44.1	44.1	94.1
41-50	2	5.9	5.9	100.0
Total	34	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Work Experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1-3 years	13	38.2	38.2	38.2
4-6 years	3	8.8	8.8	47.1
7-9 years	4	11.8	11.8	58.8
10-12 years	3	8.8	8.8	67.6
12 years and above	11	32.4	32.4	100.0
Total	34	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Education Level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Graduation	5	14.7	14.7	14.7
Post Graduation	29	85.3	85.3	100.0
Total	34	100.0	100.0	

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Table 5: Organization Type

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Manufacturing	9	26.5	26.5	26.5
Other than IT Services	12	35.3	35.3	61.8
IT/ ITEs	13	38.2	38.2	100.0
Total	34	100.0	100.0	

To assess our Hypothesis, we performed Regression using SPSS Software between Career Plateauing (Content and Structural Plateauing- Independent variables) with Intention to Quit (Dependent variable) behaviour of employees. Demographic variables showed that 82.4% were males and 17.6% were females. Most of the responses were received from employee's age ranging between 21-30 years. Also organization types were expanded to Manufacturing, IT/ ITEs and other than IT Services.

### 8. Discussion and Results

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.601 <sup>a</sup>	.361	.320	.44545

a. Predictors: (Constant), Content Plateau, Structural Plateau

Table 7: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.481	2	1.740	8.771	.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	6.151	31	.198		
	Total	9.632	33			

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Quit

b. Predictors: (Constant), Content Plateau, Structural Plateau

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Significant ANOVA indicates model is valid.

Table 8: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.482	.266		5.580	.000
	Structural Plateau	-.124	.122	-.224	-1.022	.315
	Content Plateau	.532	.155	.753	3.430	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Quit

Result of this study indicates that employees are in Career Plateau phase. Most of the employees are undergoing Content Plateau, but very few are experiencing Structural Plateau. From coefficients table it is observed that only content plateau ( $\beta=532$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) have a significant impact on intention to quit behaviour of employees. Whereas structural plateau ( $\beta=-.124$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) has no significant impact on intention to quit behaviour of employees. Employees suffering from Content Plateau have a significant impact on Intention to Quit behaviour of employees working in organizations.

Data collected from various organizations showed that employees suffering from decreased pay-scale, relocation problems and improper work life balance exhibit increased number of intention to quit behaviour of employees. If employee exhibit Career Plateau, this feeling can negatively impact their behaviour. This confirms the impact of Career Plateauing on Intention to Quit behaviour of employees.

Hence, we can state that Intention to Quit is significantly dependent on Content Plateau.

## **9. Conclusion and Future Research**

The results suggest several major conclusions both from theoretical and practical perspective in real life. First, they confirm theoretical results regarding relationships between Career Plateauing (in terms of Content and Structural Plateau) and key variables in the field of Intention to Leave and organizational commitment. From a practical perspective, the results

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are interesting in which Career Plateaued employees need proper guidance which will decrease the impact of Content Plateau on intention to quit.

Most of the employees experience Content Plateau. Measures that could help to avoid these feelings of Content Career Plateauing would include proper work content, appropriate job title, work should not be repetitive and employee should not feel bored or no more challenges left in his job profile. Ineffectiveness and Inefficiency in the management of organization and not focusing towards employee's concern, may contribute to employees turnover in various industries. The present study further reveals that the employers of the respondents are not paying attention to the factors that influence employee's Turnover rate.

To extend this research, future researchers should explore the link between Structural Career Plateau and Intention to Quit behaviour of employees. This link has already been studied in this paper, but it indicates that intention to quit should not necessarily increase because of Career Plateauing. As Career Plateauing is not a reflection of Intention to Quit behaviour of employees.

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