

CAREER PLATEAU AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

This study focused on exploring the causes and influence of career plateau on an individual and recommends best strategies to manage an employee who face this ugly phenomenon since career plateau among secondary educators may pose formidable obstacles to the realization of educational goals and objectives as stipulated in the national policy of education.

Key words: *Plateauing, Determinants of career plateau, Employee performance*

Introduction

In many organizations (school), the work force is one of the most significant contributors to the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. The school as a social organization is peopled. Each individual have different interest and is assigned with different role within the school. Together these individual interests and role function for the achievement of the educational goal. However, Plateauing among teachers and administrators of schools may pose formidable obstacle to the realization of educational success.

Career plateau is the immobility of career in organization. It is a situation whereby an employee can no longer go up the ladder due to one reason or another. This in some cases could be as a result of downsizing, flattening, hierarchies, business, reengineering and sometimes unplanned career management in organization. Career plateau relates to the movement up the hierarchy as the only sources of career success (Choy and Savory, 1998).

In the civil service (Ministry of Education) when an employee gets to the rank of principal, the possibility of further promotion is very slim due to the limited no of vacancies up the ladder. So it becomes imperative that the principal are retired from that rank whether he is active or not after being plateau or stagnated for some years. During this period of stagnation, little or no contribution is made by the plateaued workers no wonder Lee, (2003) argues that career plateau has the potential to cause discomfort among employees because lack of continued upward progressing is considered as a yardstick to measure employees performance. Thus career plateau leads to poor performance. In any organization, upward movement in terms of promotion of employees is accompanied by increase in salary, power

and status (Lee, 2003). Plateau employees are likely to have higher labour turnover because they want to look for alternative job somewhere else.

Employees who experience career immobility would think that their employers deny their career success. They lose their morale when they continue to work in the same job grade over a long period of time. The plateaued employees are defined as individual whose productivity has leveled off or declined over a period of time due to lack of motivation (Hall, 1997). According to Jelienek (2006), managers who supervises and otherwise works with this individuals often learn that some representatives exhibit various non-productive mental state and behavior which can impact upon their effectiveness. This conditions include stress, low self esteem and mental exhaustion. Others include ; lack of ability to cope with change, small level of job involvement, reduced job satisfaction, inadequate job performance, lack of initiative and morale and excessive absenteeism and tardiness (Lee 2003).

Some researchers found that plateaued workers would spend 2 to 3 years longer per job than their non-plateaued counterparts (Rosenbaum, 1979; Veiga, 1981, 1983).

The concept of career plateau

Career plateau is defined as a point in a career where the likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very low (Chao, 1990; Savery 1990). In most cases career plateau is defined on the likelihood of future promotion, the length of time in the present position or the length of time between promotions. The use of promotion to operationally define plateauing assumes a direct relationship between level in an organizational hierarchy and job responsibility. However employees may be given more responsibility without a change in job title (Feldman & Breth, 1983). Similarly, employees can be given new jobs titles, portrayed as promotions, but their responsibilities actually decreases. It can be suggested that an employee can be considered plateaued if his or her likelihood of further assignment of increased responsibility is low.

Many people experience the situation at one point during their career of becoming “struck” with little or no movement up the career ladder, either for profession or personal reason.

A career plateau is:

- The point the likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very remote.
- The point where there are few opportunities for advancement.
- A period by which an individual learning rate does not improve.
- A time of perceived or actual profession stagnation.

Career plateau is a point in one’s life where the likelihood of one's progression is reduced. You may feel you have hit a plateau for a wide variety of reasons such as reaching the possible level in your company, feeling restricted in your role, or no longer feeling challenged or engaged in your work (insight@cimaglobal.com, 2013).

Career plateau can be seen as the point at which future career mobility including both upward and lateral becomes impossible. Career plateau is often associated with a number of negative works such as lack of career satisfaction and job satisfaction, as well as an increase in the level of turnover intention.

Ferrence et al (1997), Mayasarri (2009) proposed a model of managerial career that describes the state of someone career based on current performance and the likelihood of future promotion, observing both individuals who have reached career plateau and those who have not.

The four principal career stated in the model are learners or comers, stars, solid citizens and dead wood.

Learners or comers: Describe individuals that have high potential for advancement but presently perform below standards, examples trainees who are still learning their new jobs are not yet fully integrated into the organizations culture. Also included are longer service managers who have recently been promoted to new positions which they are yet to master.

Stars: These are individuals who presently do outstanding work and are viewed as having high potential “fast track” career parts. They are readily identifiable in organizations and receive the most attention in development programmes and managerial discussions.

Solid citizens: Their present performance is rated satisfactory to outstanding but they are seen as having little chance for future advancement. They are probably the largest group in most organization.

Deadwood: This individual have little or no potential for their advancement and their performance has fallen to an unsatisfactory level. These people have become problems whether for reasons of motivation, ability or physical difficulty. They are probably a small group in most organization and they are the recipient of considerable attention, either for rehabilitation or dismissal (FERENCE, et al 1997). This can be illustrated in the diagram below

Table 1 : Model of managerial careers

Current Performance	Likelihood of Future Promotion	
	Low	High
High	Solid Citizen (effective plateauees) Organizationally Personally Plateaued Plateaued	Stars
Low	Deadwood (ineffective plateauees)	learners

Source: Ference, T.P., Stoner, J.A., Warren, E.K (1977), *Managing the Career plateau. The Academy of Management Review, 2(4)603.*

In line with this model Bardwick (1986), indicates that there three types of plateau, these are; Structural or (hierarchical) plateauing, content plateauing, personal or life plateauing.

Structural or hierarchical plateauing: This type of plateau arises from lack of higher position in an organization. An individual has the ability to perform well in higher level jobs but unable to do so owing to lack of job opening creating a restricted opportunity for promotion.

Content plateauing: This occurs when an employee becomes saturated with all available job related information and consequently lacks further challenge to expand vocational expertise (Bardwick, 1986). Lee, (2006) states that it is a point at which employees find their job unchallenging and future employability. In addition it is not only concerned with job contents, but also whether the job enables employees to master new skills to enhance their employability and market ability.

Personal or life plateauing: This results when committed individuals begin to feel unsuccessful in their works and this spreads feeling of plateau and trapped in life. Life plateau in essence takes place when representatives are just bored, and the work is dull and routine. All three of this can exit a negative impact on market place achievement career plateau whether life, structural, successful or unsuccessful still affects the employees performance because chances of upward movement are limited or doomed. These in the long run would affect the organization in terms of high rate of labour turnover because employees may feel their career advancement in the organization is at strike.

Factors Determining Career Plateauing

Various factors contributes for employees becoming plateaued. According to Ongori and Agolla (2009), the main causes of career plateau is due to business re-engineering, downsizing and spin-off activities which make further advancement within organization becomes more unlikely and employees have to face the fact

that they have to serve in same position longer than expected. Other cause of career plateau include inappropriate abilities and skills, low need for career mobility and slow company growth (Appelbaum and Finestone, 1994). Lack of job stability, reduced organizational hierarchies and reduction of promotion opportunities are some sources which have led to career plateau in organizations (Yamamoto, 2006). Career plateau has also been caused by other factor like baby boomers that hold positions longer than expected, merger and takeovers causing lay-offs, resulting in fewer available positions but competitive (Appelbaum and Santiago 1997) cited in (Ongori and Agolla, 2009). Career plateau is also caused by age, health and organizational needs.

Feldman and Weitz (1998) identified six set of factors that contribute to career plateau. These according to them include;

- i. Individual skills and abilities which
 - Selection system deficiencies
 - Lack of training
 - Inaccurate perception of feedback.
- ii. Individual needs and values which include;
 - Low growth, need strength
 - Career anchors of security and autonomy
 - Self-imposed constraints
- iii. Lack of intrinsic motivation
 - Lack of skill variety
 - Lack of task identity
 - Low task significance
- iv. Lack of extrinsic rewards
 - Small raises
 - Few promotions
 - Inequities in reward systems
 - Uncontingent reward
- v. Stress / burnout
 - Interpersonal relationships on jobs
 - Organizational climate
 - Role conflict
- vi. Slow organizational growth
 - External business condition
 - Inaccurate personal fire carts.

In support of Feldman and Weitz (1988), Mayasari (2009) opined that the causes of career plateau can be grouped into;

1. Individual aspects which includes:
 - Lack of intrinsic motivation
 - The perception of individual
 - Familiar factors
 - Locus of control
 - Lack of individual skills and abilities
 - Work perseverance
2. Organizational aspect include factors like:
 - Absence of work content dimension
 - Low organization innovative climate

- Business strategy
- Organization characteristics
- Absence of organizational career orientation

Career Plateauing and Productivity in Secondary School

The resultant effect of career plateau on the teachers and principals of secondary schools administration does beyond health related problems no wonder Mayasari (2009) opined that career plateau leads to refusal of job involvement, low job performance, job conflict, depressive state, lack of commitment to work, lack of job satisfaction and intention to leave the job or the career. In support of this Burke and Mikkelsen, (2006) in Ongori and Agolla (2009) opined that career plateau could actually lead to work burnout, stress, less job, satisfaction, greater level of absenteeism and greater or higher job turnover. Furthermore, researchers such as (Jang and Tak, 2008, Burke and Mikkelsen, 2009, Tremblay and Rogers 2004) as cited in Ongori and Agolla (2009) opined that career plateau on the employee lead to bad performance and loss of motivation and commitment, Ongori and Agolla (2009) further stated that employees such as the secondary school teacher and administrators who take career plateau as a shock will be affected since the individual take upward or lateral movement is used as a yardstick to measure an individual's performance. However, Lee, (2003) as cited by Ongori and Agolla have a different view. Lee (2003) opined that employees who is at career plateau but acquires new skills will be satisfied. No wonder Rita and Lawson (1998) assert that individuals, who experience career plateau tends to concentrate on individual growth, catch up with professional and skills developmental plan. They further stated that the affected employees such as the secondary school education tend to have time to reflect on their future pursuit, master work skills and develop psychic energy in preparing the next transition period.

Strategies for the Management of Career Plateau by Secondary School Administrators

Having known the effect of career plateau on an individual and the organization at large, it will be pertinent for the management of secondary school education to establish strategies for the proper management of this ugly phenomenon called career plateau.

No wonder Ongori & Agolla (2009) asserts that if management and employees such as the secondary schools educators put in place the appropriate interventions and manage career plateau effectively, organizations such as the school system will benefit in terms of reducing employees turnover, increase in job satisfaction, minimize employees stress, increase employees morale, promote good employees relations, attract employees , increase profitability, enhance organization competitiveness as well as the teacher having inculcating and impacting proper knowledge to the students. In support of this, Mayasari (2009) opined that organizations such as the school system must set good orientation programmes to enhance employees who experience career plateau. They went further to say that career progress does not mean upward progress due to the flattening organization of lager structure, therefore human resources management practice have outline

programmes that can be applied in schools system. This programme according to them includes job enrichment programmes, adequate or proper compensation programme where workers who achieve the highest levels of performance receive the highest percentage raise.

Thus, organizations such as the school system can set up various types of incentive plans that reward employees for achieving specific performance goals. Organizations such as the secondary school system can also change job based pay structure, employee involvement programmes which allow workers to be more involved in decisions making other strategies according to Mayasari (2009). They include offering greater job security to the workers, assessment personality test, assessment center, benchmark, mentoring, and coaching, counseling, transparency of promotion standard.

In a similar vein, Applebaum (1994) assets that employees can help employees cope with plateau by:

- Providing opportunities for lateral growth when opportunities for upward advancement do not exists.
- Provide mentoring scheme for employee.
- Recognize the various type of career plateau employees that are experiencing and developing strategies to maximize it at the infancy stage.
- Incorporation at intrinsic job rewards to enrich the job.
- Encouragement of cross functional movement, periodic rotation and downward movement.
- Impartial performance appraisal.
- Open communication.

For Ongori and Agolla (2009) the following strategies can be used in managing career plateau;

1. The provision of counseling and out placement services for employees who decides to quit the organization.
2. The management should be able to identify the symptoms of career plateau at the infancy stage.
3. Encouragements of employees at all level of management to accept that promotion do not go for ever.
4. Employees should not be appraised objectively with a feedback mechanism.
5. Management should create an avenue where employees are dulled to further their education.
6. Rotations of job should be encouraged in organization to enable employees broaden their skills and reduce the degree of boredom.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The cause of career plateau on secondary school educators include lack of individual skills and abilities, downsizing, inappropriate abilities and skills, slow company growth, lack of job stability, reduced organizational hierarchies. Career plateau which is a major contributor to employee intension to leave an organization causes stress and burnout, depressive state, non commitment to work,

high level of absenteeism on the employees. However, Organizations will actually benefit greatly if appropriate interventions are put in place to manage this ugly phenomenon.

Implication of the Study

The contribution of this paper to the body of knowledge is that it will provide relevant information on the need for schools to employ diverse strategies and appropriate intervention to manage employees who suffer from career plateau. It will be a knowledge base to educational planners and implements on the need for cross functional movement. In addition, it will serve as a vehicle for effective management at employees within the school system.

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