

Career Plateau Different From Employee Obsolescence



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Abstract: *Employees are now 'reaching plateaus earlier in their careers than did their predecessors – and for earlier than their own expectations. So it is important for organizations and individuals to prepare to cope with the phenomenon successfully, particularly when the signs of an impending plateau are observed'. The risk of obsolescence is less if organizations accept responsibility for employee development and if employees are prepared to invest time in their development. Most of the people who join a particular job hope that they will be promoted every year or two. For example, in typical IT companies, promotions do happen year after year, based on the ratings. These promotions are given to every individual who performs within acceptable limits. He joins as a trainee software engineer then he becomes permanent after a year then senior soft engineer and so on. This is usually coupled with salary hikes too. But all good things come to an end, this cycle too halts. There comes a period when due to some reasons, promotions do stop for a period known as the career plateau.*

KEYWORDS: Career plateau, expectations, organization development, employees development

I. INTRODUCTION

Objects:

An employee is on career plateau, choices of the employee:

Stay in the company and wait for the things to improve.

Switch job for some other company which would be offering better salary and position.

Which choice to take is an extremely tricky question? But the ground rule is that if the company you are in is stable then stick on to it because situation will improve and you will be promoted in future. Meanwhile you can work on your skills and relationships within the company. The other choice is again subjective and dependent on an individual.

II. CAREER PLATEAU:

Since Thomas Ference, James Stoner, and Kirby Warren's defined the career plateau that many employees consider promotions and upward hierarchical movement as synonymous indicators of success at work.

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There are two types of career plateaus: structural and content. In structural plateauing, the individual becomes unable to rise further in the flattened organizations pyramid structure and reaches a point where the likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very low. Judith Bardwick suggested that employees also plateau when their likelihood of increased growth or challenges associated with the current job is low. When increasing job-specific task responsibility that offers developmental opportunities becomes unattainable, an employee is said to experience a content plateau. Content plateaued employees may already be proficient in their jobs, expect no further challenges to be associated with the job, and feel stifled regarding the job's content. Content plateaued employees are no longer intrigued by their work and often feel they have reached a dead end. Many researchers have empirically confirmed the existence of both of these plateau types.

III. MAJOR REASONS FOR THE CAREER PLATEAU:

- The employee has reached to the maximum level he could have with his current qualifications and skills.
- The company is going through a bad phase and can't promote more people.
- The company had a bad corporate structure due to unplanned promotions in the past and now the hierarchical pyramid is totally shapeless. So the company needs to hold on certain promotions so that the pyramid returns to its original shape.
- The employee is not interested in getting promoted. He is not performing well and is not acquiring additional skills required to be promoted to the next level.
- Poor market performance.

Many a times the plateaus are caused by the companies you work for but sometimes the plateau is self-induced. The organization may place constrains on the individuals job such that no further learning may take place. These constrains may include inflexible job description or unavailable training.

The employ may want additional increases in responsibility but does not receive them because of personal decisions imposed by the organization. This may cause the employee to perceive that there is little growth opportunity in the job and hence create a perception of content plateauing for organizational constraints reasons.



IV. RESEARCHERS HAVE SUGGESTED DIFFERENT REASONS:

Researchers have suggested different reasons to explain why employees may become plateaued. Once an individual acknowledges that a plateau has occurred, an attribution to explain why it happened is a common psychological process. Firms may plateau employees for their organizational or personal reasons. Within these broad terms, there are specific types of attributions plateaued employees may recognize. First, plateaued employees may perceive that they are plateaued because of the organization's negative assessment of their capabilities. Individuals may be plateaued because they are seen by the organization either as lacking in ability for higher-level jobs or as not desiring higher-level jobs. Managers within organizations may consciously (or subconsciously) pigeonhole employees as those who are competent and willing to move up the corporate ladder and those who are not. An organization's assessment of an individual, whether it is accurate or not, may be an antecedent condition that the employee believes created his or her plateaued state.

The individuals may suggest organizations have caused their plateaus is due to the narrowing employment pyramid. The organizational structure allows fewer and fewer employees to move up to higher management ranks. Also, downsizing eliminates many middle-management layers of the pyramid. As firms cut employees throughout the organization, the structure becomes flattened, creating even more competition than had previously existed. Since flattened organizational structures are a fact of organizational life for the foreseeable future, fewer higher level jobs will exist at many firms. These organizational constraints may effectively plateau employees.

V. TWO TYPES OF PLATEAUS:

Two types of plateaus have been identified that is structural and content, along with the reasons one might plateau, a discussion is warranted on the typical plateau attributions an employee might give for his or her plateau status. For example, an employee may be structurally plateaued for organizational assessment reasons. An employee may not receive future promotions because management believes the individual lacks the managerial ability or skills needed for higher level jobs. Or the organization may believe that the employee is not truly committed to the organization or lacks the desire to rise through the ranks. Hence the organization has made an assessment of the individual that precludes that employee from career advancement within the firm.

The lack of positions may be caused by a poor economy, downsizing, inappropriate recruiting and staffing efforts targeted at the same population, or an enlarged management rank. In any of these examples, the actions of the organization have resulted in employees, who are structurally plateaued, with no opportunity for hierarchical advancement. The above employee may be structurally plateaued due to organizational constrained. The employee has been

plateaued in this case due to issues outside the employee's control and may be the firm's control. Individuals may be content plateaued for either organizational or personal reasons. When the organization has negatively assessed the employee's capabilities, the employee may not receive any further increases in responsibility associated with the current job. The organization may place constraints on the individual's job such that no further learning may take place. These constraints may include inflexible job descriptions or unavailable training. The employee may want additional increases in responsibility but does not receive them because of personal decisions imposed by the organization. This may cause the employee to perceive that there is little growth opportunity in the job and hence creates a perception of content plateauing for organizational constraint reasons.

VI. NEGATIVE RELATED PLATEAU:

Plateaued employees are described as displaying low levels of job involvement and work motivation. Plateaued employees become less job involved because they believe that the organization has devalued their contributions. Few researchers have investigated the relationship of one's Plateaued to job involvement. Structural plateauing and content plateauing have both been found to be negatively related to job involvement. Plateaued employees report low levels of job satisfaction and career satisfaction. Researchers have found that both structural and content plateauing are negatively related to personal development satisfaction, while content plateauing is related to task dissatisfaction. Others have found that both structural and content plateauing are negatively related to both job and career satisfaction.

Work-related stress and strain have been examined as outcomes of an employee's plateau state. Structurally Plateaued employees have reported greater work-related stress than have non-plateaued employees. Researchers have found that both structural and content plateaued employees experience high levels of job strain and that structurally Plateaued employees report experiencing high levels of job-induced tension. Although these studies used various stress scales, there seems to be consistency in the direction of these relationships.

VII. POSITIVE RELATED PLATEAU:

Although many negative sentiments have been associated with career plateaus, Plateaued employees appreciate a few positive experiences. Most important, some research suggests that given the flattened organizational structures common to many companies, experiencing a career plateau may not be as embarrassing or stressful as it once was. In fact, the plateau event may not be a unique situation but rather the norm for many employees'

career progressions. From this perspective, plateaus may be more common and acceptable periods in one's career than was previously thought.

Plateaued employees are expected to invest less of themselves in the job and more in non-work activities. According to compensatory theory, disappointments in one sphere of life tend in some way to be made up for in another sphere. Therefore, plateaued employees psychologically distance themselves from work by becoming more involved in non-work issues.

VIII. CONCLUSION:

There are many opportunities for future career-plateauing research. Researchers need to be aware of the conceptual differences between the structural and content plateau construct types noted herein and pursue studies that validate these constructs. Chaos theory has been used in the counselling literature to help explain how plateaued employees deal with the events that lead to their perceptions of being plateaued. Future researchers consider chaos theory, or other theories outside the management literature, as part of the remedial process of coping with the plateau trigger event.

It is acknowledged that the current definition of career plateau holds a relatively narrow perspective of career mobility within an organization. It is also acknowledged that the boundary less career, in which the employee is self-reliant in forging his or her career across organizational boundaries, is becoming the norm. This type of career requires lifelong learning to allow individuals to become functionally capable and marketable.

Career plateau might always not be a bad thing. In the period you can work on the things you lack. You and gain additional knowledge and skill which might take you much further in your career. So career plateau is part of game. Plan it well. It is different from career stagnation; don't let the plateau become the cause of permanent stagnation.

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