Impact Of Workplace Stress On Employee Career Plateau

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Abstract: Employees are now a days reaching plateaus earlier in their careers than their predecessors. 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 plateau is less if organizations accept responsibility for employee development and if employees are prepared to invest time in their development. Stress in the job makes the employees to stagnate at one position and stops them to think of further development. This will stand as a major cause for the plateau. This paper discusses what is career plateau and the impact of job stress on plateau.

Index Terms: Job stress, organizational development, knowledge and skill, career plateau.

1. INTRODUCTION
An employee reaching the highest position in the company and if there is no possibility to grow further, this situation is called as career plateau. There may be many reasons for reaching this position. Few of them are lack of skills, not updated with latest technology, restructuring the positions in corporate, job stress and personal reasons. The plateaued employee’s position will become stagnant and will be doing repetitive work. Those employees should consult the seniors in the company to get advice to come out of the plateau or should discuss with HR to improve their skills and get more chances to fight the plateau situation. Most of the people who join a particular job hope that they will be promoted in a 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. An employee joins as a trainee software engineer then based on performance his position will change from trainee to software engineer and senior software engineer to project manager to project head. 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.

2. OBJECTIVES
- To define career plateau and types of plateau
- To define job stress
- Defining impact of job stress on plateau
- Relating job stress and career plateau through statistical analysis.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW
Career plateau is defined as the point at which future career mobility including both upward and lateral moves (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). According to Kahnweiler (2006), organizations have to carry out key career self management strategies in sustaining human resources management success.

If related to career plateau, Nachbagauer & Riedl (2002) found that there is a significant and negative link between career plateau and job satisfaction. Individual having skill and abilities means, that individual has an individual's level of proficiency at performing a particular task and has a more general enduring capability that an individual possesses (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, Wright, 2008). Nicholson (1993) that argued that subjective measurement of career plateau explained more work attitude on career plateau.

4. CAREER PLATEAU
An employee reaching the higher position in the organisation and founds no option to get promoted vertically is said to be reaching the plateaued stage. At this stage he may need to repeat the same job which leaves him no options to grow progress further. They will lose the potential towards their career development. This will lead to create stress and stagnancy.

5. OF CAREER PLATEAU
There are different reasons for reaching the plateau stage. The causes might differ from person to person. They might be external or internal factors. Internal Factors: Lack of skills and lack of interest to develop the professional skills are foremost internal factors for career plateau. Employee not taking initiative for the career development, employer not showing interest to arrange training programs for the sake of employees career growth etc are other internal factors that affect the career and stagnates at the same position. External factors: These factors include the seniority level of the employee, size of the company and type and location of the company etc. For example, higher level positions will be very few in a startup company. In a family owned business, senior level positions will be held by senior level members and employee career will be stagnated at the same positions for a long time.
Other reasons for Career plateau:
- A sick organisation cannot offer promotion to employees
- No formal hierarchical structure in the company will have less chances for promotions.
- Employee is not showing enthusiasm to learn latest technology thus not getting promoted to next level.
- Very poor sales performance
- Poor job performance of the employee
- Personal preference of the employee not to get promoted due to personal constraints.

6. TYPES OF CAREER PLATEAU

Career plateaus are of two types
- Structural and
- Content plateau

In structural career plateau, an employee reaches a point where the hierarchy structure in the organisation prevents the employee to move up in the career. Employee will have no control over such things. He may become frustrated as he could not move up and this frustration may result in less involvement in the work and that results in less productivity. This is the reason for considering the career plateau as a negative factor.

In content plateau, an employee would have mastered the skills that are needed for his current job and does not show interest in taking additional responsibilities and not willing to move to another department.

7. MANAGING CAREER PLATEAU

Plateaued employees tend to show negative work attitude thus having low levels of career satisfaction. It can be said that the plateau stage is negatively related to personal and career development.

There are plenty of ways by which an employee can manage his plateaued stage.
- Consider and consolidate existing work, tasks and skills required for performing those skills. This is useful in finding the blind spots. Based on the results try to learn the skills that are short of.
- Talk to HR or floor manager to take up additional responsibilities to enrich the current job.
- Volunteer to get new assignments within the team or with other teams.
- Take up some courses or professional skills to hone the promotional opportunities.
- Spare some time for searching for new opportunities.
- Look for job satisfaction as the promotion is not the only way that gives job satisfaction. Other parameters like recognition of work, assigning more responsibilities etc are factors for job satisfaction.
- Look for a new job or new role in a new company.
- Expand the circle of contacts, attending social events and keeping them in touch will bring more chances to move on.
- Pursue interest in other aspects of life other than job will enhance the self-esteem thus prevents to feel the boredom in the work.
- Focus on the work and opportunities where professional satisfaction can be achieved.

8. WORKPLACE STRESS

Plateaued employees will be subjected to work related stress and strain. It is observed that workplace stress is more in structurally plateaued employees than non-plateaued employees. Workplace stress is a physiological condition in which the employee feels that the work assigned to him is becoming burdensome and will be subjected to mental and physical unwellness. Employee sometimes feels that the employer is imposing high expectations and responsibilities. The fear of loosing job if it is the only source of income, also creates stress on the employee. Workplace stress brings down the performance of the employee. This will raise the costs of the employer as the productivity is directly proportionate to the performance of the employees. Sometimes stress brings back the focus and enables to concentrate on work when it is taken with positive attitude. Working for long hours to meet the deadlines causes the stress levels to go high and affects both physical and mental wellness.

Few of general causes of stress at work place are:
- Insecurity of job
- Over work and staying late at work.
- Long hours of work
- Lack of focussing on work
- Demand to continue the office work at home also.
- Dissatisfaction and less interest at work
- Dislike in the career chosen
- Conflict with co-workers and supervisors
- Office politics
- Unfair promotion policy of organisation
- Unstructured hierarchy that gives chances for career plateau.

![Fig.1 Picture showing causes of workplace stress](image-url)
9. EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE STRESS
Workplace stress generally interferes with personal life. That destroys the peace at home and affects the personal relations among the family members. This will affect the physical health also like sleep disorders etc. This may lead to chronic health problems like cardiovascular disease, psychological, musculoskeletal disorders etc. Short temper, poor morale and frequent headaches are also few of the after effects of workplace stress.

10. MANAGING WORKPLACE STRESS
For every problem there will be n number of solutions. For managing workplace stress there are lot of fixes. Though each fix is specific to a specific cause, few can be considered as general solutions. They are:
- Take a break in the initial stage of stress. Going for a vacation or family outing may help to reduce the stress levels.
- Avoid working for long hours and do not bring work to home.
- Try to create a friendly atmosphere among the co-workers.
- Start looking for a new fulfilling career.
- Prepare to quit the job

METHODOLOGY
A survey was conducted in a manufacturing company by distributing the questionnaire with the questions focusing on relation between job stress and career plateau. Response of 220 employees at different level is collected and tabulated in table 1 below. The responses are analysed using Pearson’s correlation test to arrive at a solution.

Pearson’s Correlation Test
Pearson’s correlation test has been conducted between frequency of job stress and creation of career stagnation.

Hypothesis: There exists a relationship between workplace stress and career plateau of Employees.

The table for the above hypothesis is shown below:

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<th>Opinion</th>
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<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>DA</th>
<th>SDA</th>
<th>Total(y)</th>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>31-35 years</td>
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<td>36-41 years</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>31</td>
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11. RESULT ANALYSIS
The Pearson’s correlation test shows the hypothesis is proved and there exists high degree of relationship between career plateau & workplace stress of the employees.

12. CONCLUSION
Career plateau can occur at any stage or any level for an employee. This plateau once occurred may cause workplace stress. Or it can happen in the other way also. Continuous stress at workplace may lead to career plateau as the stress will make the employee to lose the focus on work. It is proven fact that both career plateau and workplace stress are inter related. One factor will lead to generate the other factor. By taking proper measures in the initial stages of plateau or workplace stress, these two can be avoided.

13. REFERENCES