



DURBAN CAMPUS

# The Effect of Career Plateauing on Job Satisfaction and Motivation

A research report presented to  
The Graduate School of Business  
University of Natal Durban

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Masters of Business Administration Degree

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is not a confidential report and it maybe used freely by the Graduate School of Business.

I wish to thank Professor D Coldwell, of the Graduate School of Business, University of Natal, for his guidance and valuable advise on my dissertation.

I would also like to dedicate my thesis to a very dear friend, Kovilan Moothan, who was a fellow colleague during my studies.

I, certify that, except as noted, that this report is my own work and all references used are accurately reported.

**SIGNED**



**LUBAINA ISMAIL**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

1. Introduction	1
2. Problem statement	4
3. Objectives of the study	6
4. Significance of the study	8
5. Scope and Limitations	9

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

6. The Career Concept	10
7. Life and Career Stages	16
7.1 Stages in Career development	16
7.2 Life Stages	19
8. Motivation and Job Satisfaction	23
9. Career Plateauing	25
9.1 Subjective & Objective Plateaus	26
10. Life stage theories of plateauing and succession	27
10.1 Determinants of a Career Plateau	29
10.1.1 Factors contributing to a Career Plateau	29
10.1.1.1 Impact of the economic environment	29
10.1.1.2 Organisational posture	30
10.1.1.3 Organisational culture	30

10.1.1.4	The specific job and supervisor	31
10.2	Plateaued performers	32
10.2.1	Productively plateaued	32
10.2.2	Partially plateaued	33
10.2.3	Pleasantly plateaued	33
10.2.4	Passively plateaued	33

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

11.	Methodology	34
11.1	Research Design	34
11.2	Sampling	34
11.2.1	Population	34
11.2.2	Sample	35
11.2.3	Sampling method	35
11.2.4	Data Collection	35
11.2.5	Questionnaire Design	35
11.3	Analysis of the Data	37
11.3.1	Descriptive Statistics	37
11.3.2	Inferential Statistics	37
11.4	Correlation	37
11.5	Reliability	37
11.6	Validity	38
11.7	Frequencies	38
11.8	Internal Consistency of Instrument	38

**CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

- 12. Findings from the survey questions \_\_\_\_\_ 39
  - 12.1 Career Plateauing questionnaire results \_\_\_\_\_ 39
  - 12.2 Job Satisfaction questionnaire results \_\_\_\_\_ 45
  
- 13. Summation of Results \_\_\_\_\_ 49
  - 13.1 Analysis of career plateauing linked to age \_\_\_\_\_ 49
  - 13.2 Analysis of job satisfaction being linked to age \_\_\_\_\_ 51
  - 13.3 Analysis of career plateauing linked to male age groups \_\_\_\_\_ 53
  - 13.4 Analysis of career plateauing linked to female age groups \_\_\_\_\_ 54
  - 13.5 Analysis of job satisfaction being linked to male age groups \_\_\_\_\_ 55
  - 13.6 Analysis of job satisfaction being linked to female age  
Groups \_\_\_\_\_ 56
  - 13.7 Analysis of career plateauing being linked to length of time in  
Current job \_\_\_\_\_ 58
  - 13.8 Analysis of job satisfaction being linked to length of time in  
Current job \_\_\_\_\_ 59
  - 13.9 Analysis of career plateauing being linked to years  
Employed \_\_\_\_\_ 60
  - 13.10 Analysis of job satisfaction being linked to years employed \_\_\_\_\_ 61
  
- 14. Correlational findings and Interpretations \_\_\_\_\_ 63

**CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

15. Discussion of findings\_\_\_\_\_ 69

15.1 Research Objective # 1 answered\_\_\_\_\_ 69

15.2 Research Objective # 2 answered\_\_\_\_\_ 69

15.3 Research Objective # 3 answered\_\_\_\_\_ 71

15.4 Research Objective # 4 answered\_\_\_\_\_ 72

15.5 Research Objective # 5 & 6 answered\_\_\_\_\_ 75

16. Recommendations\_\_\_\_\_ 78

17. Conclusion\_\_\_\_\_ 84

18. Bibliography\_\_\_\_\_ 87

**APPENDICES**

- Appendix A: Career Plateauing Questionnaire
- Appendix B: Job Satisfaction Questionnaire
- Appendix C: Reliability Analysis

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Career Management – the implications of change	4
Figure 2. Sources of our Career Behaviour	10
Figure 3. Career moves in an organisation	13
Figure 4. Various career stage theories	16
Figure 5. The life career rainbow	19
Figure 6. Herzberg's two factor theory	24
Figure 7. Categorisation – performance / potential	27
Figure 8. Four kinds of plateaued performers	32
Results – Career Plateauing questionnaire	39
Results – Job Satisfaction questionnaire	45
Figure 9.1. Responses to various age categories	49
Figure 9.2. Responses to various age categories	52
Figure 9.3. Responses to various male age groups	53
Figure 9.4. Responses to various female age groups	54
Figure 9.5. Responses to various male age groups	55
Figure 9.6. Responses to various female age groups	56
Figure 9.7. Responses to length of time in current job	58
Figure 9.8. Responses to length of time in current job	59
Figure 9.9. Responses to year employed	60
Figure 9.10. Responses to year employed	61
Figure 10. Positive and negative coping responses	76
Figure 11. Job Characteristics model	80
Figure 12. Career Patterns	84
Figure 13. Career Development System	85

## 1. INTRODUCTION

New and latest technologies have traditionally been the overwhelming competitors in the workplace. With the economy shrinking and foreign investment and confidence in the market waning, companies not meeting their expected profit and with cheap labour crossing the borders, or goods being able to be secured cheaper, jobs are not totally secure. At the same time people change their careers at least once in their lifetime: an everlasting career does not exist any longer. Some people peak in their careers, some stay satisfied, while others reach an impasse or a career “doldrum”.

The subject for my study is the state referred to as “plateauing”, and rightfully the perception of plateauing, which is clearly misunderstood. The dissertation sets the tone for the topic by introducing concepts such as the career, familiarity with career maturity, career success, career anchors and other relevant methodology. In understanding the sources of career behaviour, it is important to establish what factors shape our values, thoughts and choices. It is these factors surrounded with environmental constraints that lead to the outcomes for individuals both successes and failures.

Over the years, certain consistent trends in the audit of attitudes and perceptions have emerged. Sociological studies in essence have shown whites tended to be more positive than blacks; men tended to be more positive than women; and higher job grades tended to be more positive than lower job grades. If that was not enough, then came government legislation in terms of Employment Equity, which added to the problems associated with plateauing, intended to correct the imbalances from the past. Addressing historical problems of job preservation for whites, and organisations that were dominated by white men.

Adding to this myriad of developments, many argue this is “reverse racism” as Indians, Coloureds and white women suffer the bitter end of affirmative action

policies not properly implemented. This again today exacerbates to the problem of the “glass ceiling syndrome”, job dissatisfaction and low morale.

This dissertation gathers insight to the concept of the career as traditionally known and its developments. The theory of Herzberg is discussed which is important to the research as it shows intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors that determine the individual’s motivation to work and to perform.

Super’s (Career Pattern Study, 1990, Columbia University) life stages theory is compared to stages in one’s career. The parallel between the two stages shows how a career is a very real and integrated part of a person’s life. This discussion gives the reader more insight into the subject matter.

From hereon, the thesis introduces the topic of plateauing and the definition that embodies what plateauing entails. The thesis goes on to advise what causes plateauing. To exemplify this state even further, the life cycle theories of plateauing and succession are discussed. This cycle is broken down into four types of employees and details how organisations should deal with these four types of individuals at various career stages. The discussion is important to show a distinction between individuals and hence their motivation levels at various stages of their life cycles. For example, “deadwood or stars” have different motivation levels and aspirations and must be considered differently, bearing this in mind.

The dissertation goes on to substantiate the methodology used in order to confirm the hypothesis tested. The surveys are discussed in detail, their contents and results are analysed in the interpretation section.

Various means of statistics were gauged in order to verify results, frequencies, summaries and correlations are discussed at length. The correlations data are commented on. Significance levels and correlation data are summated, and comments are made in respect to the findings.

The conclusion surmises the entire research study with specific reference to the issues prevalent in this dissertation and happenings in industry today.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Career plateaus happen to almost everyone in the course of their careers.

Take the example of a man aged 43 who works for a large organisation and has discovered that he is no longer being promoted. He has always expected that he would be able to work his way up in the organization until he reaches the top. Thus far, he has received promotions frequently, has made steady progress up the corporate ladder, and has been rewarded for his efforts with money, fringe benefits and job titles. He has always firmly believed that he is destined for the very top. Then one day a promotion he expects to receive is given to one of his colleagues. Surprised and disappointed, he consults his superiors, only to be told that his work performance is perfectly satisfactory. He continues his work as before, but the next time promotions are announced, he is once again not among them. It is then that he realizes that there will be no more promotions for him because his career has plateaued. The story above is typical of individuals finding no growth in organisations today.

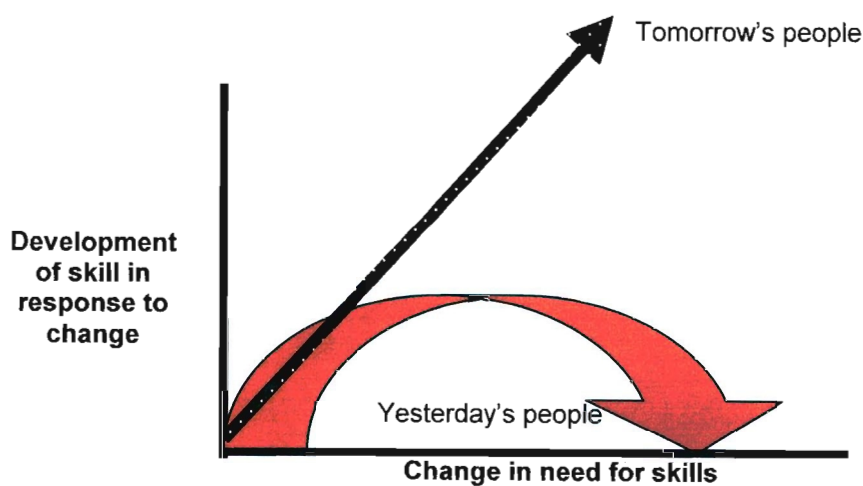


Fig 1. Career Management – the implications of change

Figure 1 exemplifies the problem of plateauing i.e. people's need to acquire and even change skills in response to organisational / personal growth. If you're feeling like the 43-year-old man above it's time you did some soul searching to establish some change mechanism to deal with this state. This dissertation outlines the above, the causes of plateauing and recommended suggestions.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of Career Plateauing on Job Satisfaction and Motivation. A perception of plateauing will differ in accordance with specific individual's expectations and it will be the perception rather than the actual time of remaining stationary in one's career that is likely to be demotivating. A sense of plateauing is only really likely to be perceived negatively among personnel with particular experiences – it is related to:

- Age
- Sex
- Job Tenure
- Number of years employed in the company
- Perception of being passed over for promotion
- Perception of slowness of promotion
- Perception of lacking ability – indication of competence / competencies

A plateaued person who perceives himself / herself as being plateaued can react in several ways:

- Feelings of dissatisfaction
- Dislike of job
- They want to leave their current jobs
- Defensive
- Depressed
- Underachievement
- Constructive

The following were hypothesised: -

1. That job satisfaction and motivation influence the perception of plateauing.
2. That age, sex, job tenure and number of years employed in a company influence the perception of plateauing.

3. That life cycle theories of plateauing and succession are important determinants for companies dealing with plateaued individuals.
4. That the recognition of a career plateau is a source of stress (stressor) to many individuals.
5. That coping responses are developed by individuals as a result of the career plateauing stress.
6. That personal and organisational variables unique to each individual will moderate the selection of specific coping responses to the plateau.

## 4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

We know from the Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) that if a person has the necessary ability, then the more effort the person exerts, the more likely he or she is attain that goal. The basis of an employee's relationship with his company hinges on rewards and benefits. Theorists have proven for decades that in order to obtain happy productive workers, it is essential for them to be satisfied and motivated. These satisfaction levels benefit both the organisation and the individual as a whole relationship extends to the workplace and to the home life of an individual.

This study is based on an organisation in the health care industry, herein referred to as Company A. Company A is in the business of administering medical aids and has gone through a few take-overs of smaller schemes, and has streamlined its business as a whole. Tremendous change has occurred, retrenchments, closure of non-core business and overall the motivation levels are low and the satisfaction degree questionable.

It is for this reason that this thesis was conducted in this company. The study results would therefore be beneficial to this company or companies with similar dispositions. It provides recommendations to combat this perception of plateauing and provides an implication for management and the organisation on how to handle this stage of an individual's career.

Aiming to research the effect of career plateauing on job satisfaction and motivation in Company A, this study attempts to determine whether the sex, age group, job tenure, job satisfaction and the number of years employed in an organisation influence the career state of an employee.

## 5. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The dissertation is quite extensive in its subject content, however I believe that the following factors need to be highlighted in order to give the reader an idea of some of the limitations the writer was exposed to. This would enhance the readers' understanding of the subject matter further.

The study is limited to the career patterns of employees in Company A. It is further limited to the following: -

- Only certain employees (n=50) occupying certain positions within the company were studied. A larger sample size would have made the results more quantifiable and the survey consisting of a larger population size would have made the results more valid. The results would be based on conclusions from a wider, and bigger sample size.
- The healthcare industry was used to base the surveys upon. This is limiting, as this perception could be reliable for this sector of the market only. The study could have been concluded across industries i.e. insurance, and even across companies i.e. other medical aid administration companies. This would be useful to gather data across professional business.
- The value of the study depends very much on the willingness of the individuals to participate in the mailed questionnaire and on the honesty and sincerity of those surveyed.

Having said all of the above, the research has tried to encapsulate all that it set out to in terms of its objectives and thereby accomplishing it.

6. THE CAREER CONCEPT

A career can be defined as a sequence of separate but related work activities that provides continuity, order and meaning in a person’s life. Careers are both individually perceived and societally constrained (Flippo, E B, 1984)

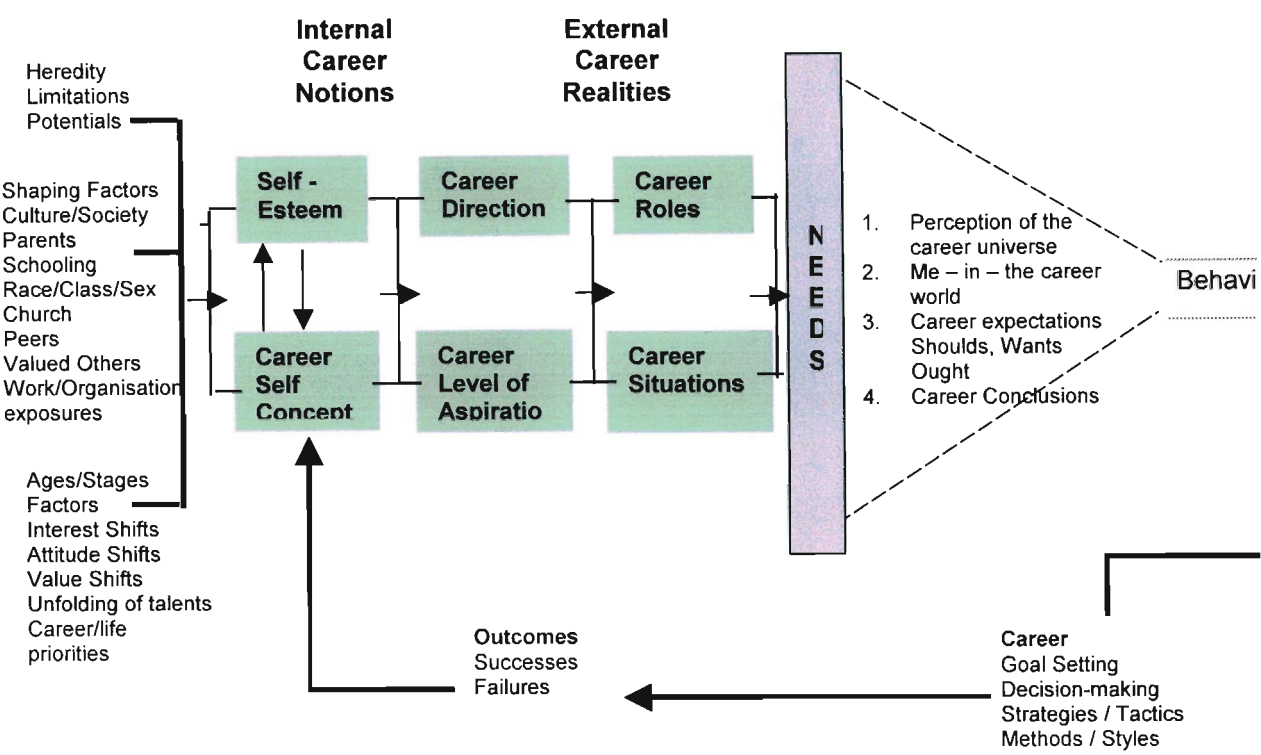


Fig 2: Sources of our Career Behaviour

As the figure above illustrates, fundamental inputs consists of physical and mental characteristics, parents, schooling, ethnic groupings, sex, peers, organisational experiences, and age. From these the individual will develop a notion of a career that is closely related to his or her need for self esteem. A direction will be selected and goals and levels of aspiration will emerge. As the diagram suggests, internal career notion must be tested by external realities. These feed into the needs of an individual and answers pertinent questions in respect to the individual. Having ascertained this the individual's behaviour is directed towards his career, goals, aspirations etc. that will lead to modification of the internal career notion. This aspiration level may have to

be lowered if the success timetable is not met. This, in turn, will have an impact on one's self esteem. Though it would appear that this is all the business of the individual and the organisation is only marginally concerned, the more that success can be programmed, the more valuable is the individual to the organisation (Leach J, 1997)

### **6.1 Career Planning**

In understanding the various career concepts career planning can be described as the process by which individuals gain, gather information about their careers and plan for this. This entails self-knowledge that is a pre-requisite for career planning. This involves knowledge of one's own skills, interests, values strengths and weaknesses before making decisions in respect to their careers.

### **6.2 Career Success**

Career success has different meaning for different people. To some success may mean promotion while to others success means becoming an expert in their occupational field. In today's current trends it becomes essential that the meaning of success should no longer be dependent on traditional characteristics of success such as promotion, salary increases, perks etc but should rather be reflected by the individual perception of their internal career (psychological success) (Schein, 1993)

### **6.3 Career Motivation**

Career motivation is a 'multi dimensional construct internal to individual, influenced by the situation and reflected in the individual decisions and behaviours (London 1983:630)

Career motivation can be broken down into 3 major domains: -

Career Identity	Career Insight	Career resilience
Is the degree to which people define themselves by their work and their organisation. This also determines how central the job is the individual's life.	Includes self-knowledge that is individual being aware of their strengths/weaknesses and can be tied to the individual commitment and the feeling of being citizens in the organizations.	Is the ability to adapt to changing circumstances?

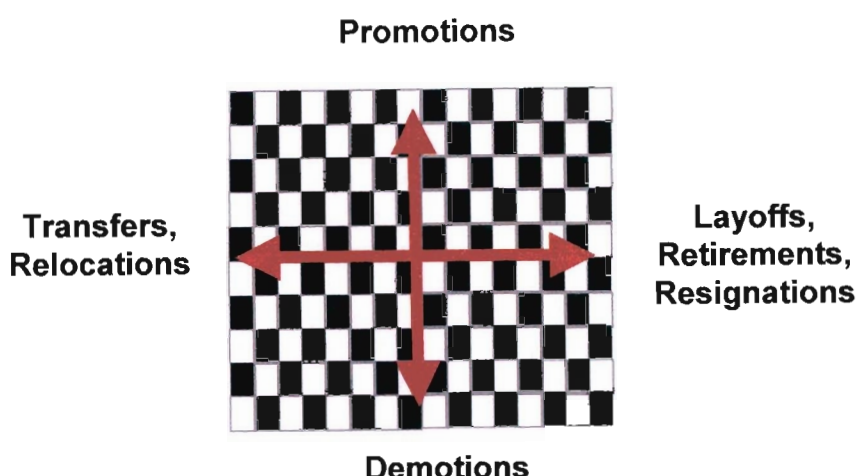
**6.4 Career Maturity**

This concept can be linked to career resilience. Individuals who make career decisions that reflect decisiveness; involvement, independence, task orientation and willingness to compromise between needs and reality have usually achieved a high degree of career maturity (London, 1993)

**6.5 Career Paths**

'Career paths are objective descriptions of sequential work experiences, as opposed to subjective, personal feelings about career progress, personal development or satisfaction' (Cascio, 1998:170)

Employees move from one job to another. Career paths provide for horizontal / vertical improvements. Traditionally career paths have been as an upward movement, however career paths may leads sideward (transfers) or downwards (demotions).



**Fig 3: As In Chess, People Can Make A Variety Of Internal Moves In An Organisation**

## **6.6 Career Patterns and Career Management**

Just as career success and advancement can indicate whether or not an individual's career is orientated around a specific career anchor (Schein, 1993) so too can these factors be indicative of career patterns that individuals follow (Brousseau, 1990)

### **6.6.1 The linear career pattern**

Employees with this pattern prefer to move up quickly in the hierarchy of the organisation, a tall pyramid and narrow span of control structure relate to this career pattern. They value leadership efficiency and logistics management as performance factors and prefer rewards such as promotions, executive bonuses, high salaries, quick recognition and incentives. This pattern is usually found amongst managerial staff.

### **6.6.2 The expert career pattern**

In this style, individuals choose a career field and remain in it for the duration of their career. The individual identifies strongly with the occupation and typical examples are those of a lawyer, doctor and engineer. The expert career pattern relates to a flat organisational structure with strong functional departments. Employees associated with this pattern value quality, reliability, stability and technical competence as performance factors and prefer rewards

such as fringe benefits, recognition and continual technical training. They usually want to be recognised for their expertise in a specific field.

### **6.6.3 The spiral career pattern**

In this style, people tend to change fields periodically. These changes are major and entail a change from one field to another, thus allowing the individual to develop new skills and capabilities while using the expertise acquired from previous experience. The spiral career pattern relates to a matrix, self-directed interdisciplinary teams. Individuals associated with this pattern, value creativity, teamwork and people development as performance factors and prefer rewards such as lateral assignments, cross training and creative latitude.

### **6.6.4 The transitory career pattern**

This style of pattern is characterised by many career changes. As a pattern the transitory career has been referred to as a 'consistent pattern of inconsistency.' These people tend to change jobs – or even career fields – every two to four years. The transitory career pattern relates to a loose, amorphous structure and temporary teams. Individuals associated with this pattern value speed adaptability and innovation as performance factors and prefer rewards such as immediate cash bonuses, independence and autonomy, special temporary assignments and job rotation.

As some organisations are still characterised by stability and well-defined structures there is still room in the current work environment for expert and linear groups to advance their careers. The traditional organisational structure favours employees with spiral and transitory careers less. Individuals who are transitory or spiral orientated are more likely to progress in the present business environment, where individuals who are prepared to move and adapt quickly are now required.

Employees with linear and expert patterns are probably less comfortable in the present job situation and may face an unfriendly environment. As organisations have different needs at different times, a pluralistic approach to

organisational design, which provides for diverse career experiences, would probably solve the problem best.

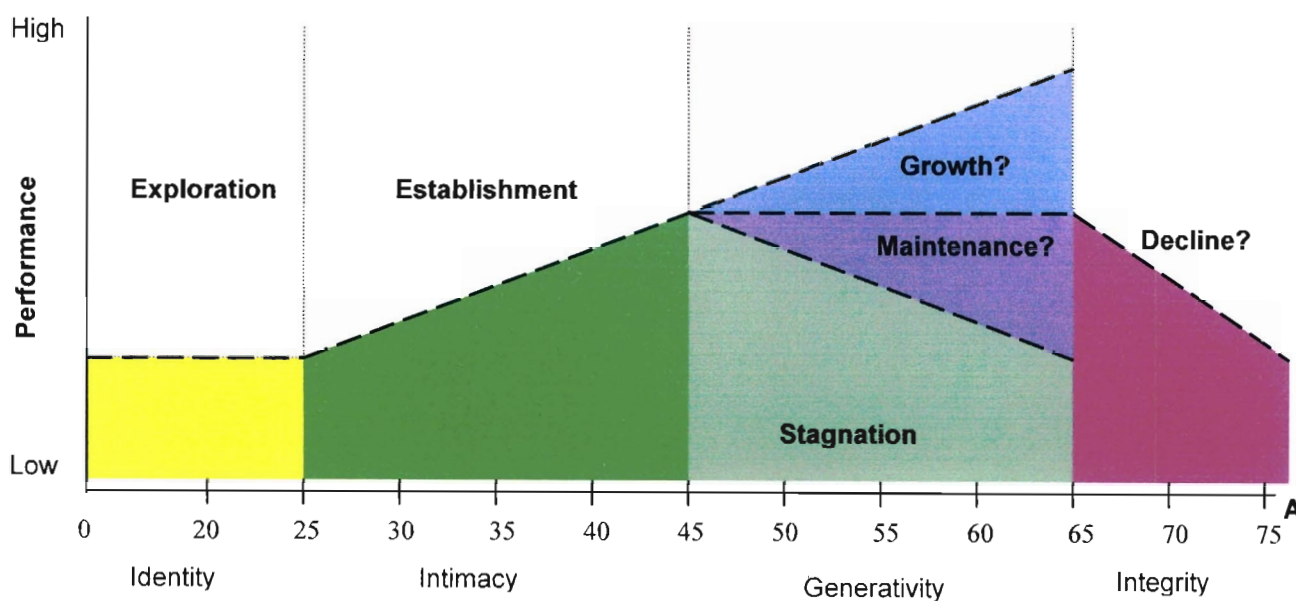
Organisations often have an expert structure, and value expert competencies, but emphasise linear rewards. In companies such as these, where the career pattern of an individual is not supported, frustration will occur.

To increase career satisfaction organisations should strive for a fit between career culture of the organisation and the career pattern of the worker. A career culture can be defined in terms of organisational structure, reward systems, policies as well the nature of rewards, and training and development activities. After determining the career culture of the organisation by looking at the above factors, the employee's career pattern can be determined. If there is a poor fit between employee and organisation, the employee should be trained in order to adapt or certain organisational policies should be altered. (Brousseau et al. 1996)

# 7. LIFE AND CAREER STAGES

Career development can be studied by relating career stages to stages during the lifespan. By relating careers to life stages, it is assumed that the two are intrinsically interwoven. In industrial and post-industrial societies, people increasingly do not compartmentalize their lives into job and personal activities; instead they seek balance and integration (Boyatzis & Kolb, 2000)

The various career stage theories have been combined by Hall (1976) into a composite model.



**Fig 4: Various career stage theories**

## 7.1 Stages in Career Development

The above summarizes the relationship between career stages and individual needs. The exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline stages are defined by Super (1957). Inherent to the model is a career stage/age relationship. Donald E Super developed his views on career development over a period of approximately forty years of research.

Super describes the following life stages :-

#### **7.1.1 Growth (birth to age ± 12-14)**

Children develop concepts of themselves through contact with adults who become role models. Curiosity drives them to explore and experience the world around them. Experiences lead them to develop interests, which, together with the development of self-esteem, autonomy and future perspective, provide the capacity to forward planning. If these characteristics do not develop, feelings of alienation, of being helpless in a world dominated by other people may result, with the possibility, with the possibility that an individual may become a conformist, a drifter or a flounderer.

#### **7.1.2 Exploration (adolescence, ± 14-25)**

Adolescents at first make tentative career choices, which may be tried out in the exploration of part-time or holiday work. Tentative choices are usually followed by exploration of a chosen field in greater depth. An individual may also pursue a particular field as a result of the inspiration or expectations of parents and other adults. Such an early choice, may at a later stage, result in career crises when individuals cannot cope with change because they are accustomed to seeing a career as encompassing 'an occupation' rather than as different roles or directions.

#### **7.1.3 Establishment (early adulthood, age ±25-45)**

Establishment generally involves a period of trial in the late twenties and a period of stabilization in the thirties and early forties. During stabilization security and advancement become priorities. Frustration due to unsuccessful stabilization may lead to either stagnation or to change. Super contends, that most people, including those who find stabilization and those who favour change, see the years of early adulthood as the best years of their lives.

#### **7.1.4 Maintenance (middle adulthood, age ± 45-65)**

In this stage there is generally continuation along established lines in one's work. Some individuals, who have not achieved what they wanted to, may

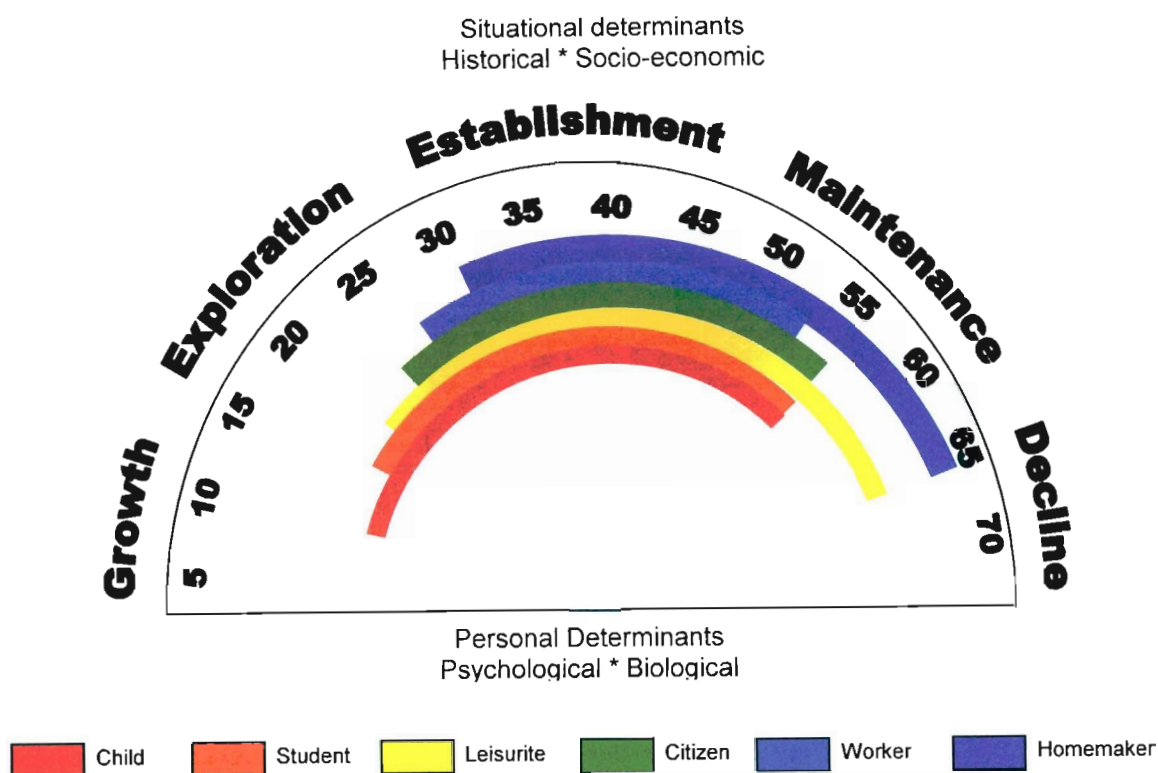
stagnate in the status quo and avoid actively acquiring new knowledge and skills. Others may focus on reaching further goals, for example by means of continuing education, while others still become innovators of change, akin to some individuals in the establishment stage.

#### **7.1.5 Decline (old age, from $\pm$ 65)**

As people enter old age, they tend to first decelerate work activities by seeking less responsibility or selectively changing work roles. As they decline in their physical and mental powers, they may selectively start disengaging from work roles. Depending on the person and the situation, retirement may result in a sense of loss, or it may be stimulating in that new choices can be made.

Although Super distinguishes these life stages, he stresses the point that individuals do not develop uniformly. Life stages normally occur at the approximate ages, but are not discrete and invariable. Exploration, for example, which is generally associated with adolescence, may manifest in adult stages in the form of exploring new roles. The underlying principle of exploration remains the same, but manifest in different forms in different stages. A career may include not only new explorations but also new growth in different stages, or re-establishment in different types of roles or jobs. This process of recurring life stage characteristics is referred to as recycling (Super, 1990).

Super's view of a career as a series of life stages in the course of the total life span is graphically portrayed as a model called the Life Career rainbow (Super, 1998, 1990, 1992).



**Fig 5: The Life-Career Rainbow: Nine life roles in schematic life space**

## 7.2 Life Stages

Development consists of different life stages. Although childhood and adolescence are not part of the individual's careers, influences in these early stages have implications in their work lives.

In trying to understand life stages in congruence with career stages, the Establishment stage initiates the career stages.

### 7.2.1 Establishment stage

This lasts up to 5 years of employment. It is the stabilization phase of an individual where he learns more about the organization, its policy and procedure, and its culture. This is an important stage for the individual as a well-negotiated psychological contract between the parties increases mutual acceptance and minimizes uncertainties between the employer and the employee.

At this stage it is important to communicate to the individual a realistic recruitment programme identifying exactly what is required of him without any uncertainties that may arise due to differences between the individual's expectations of the job and the reality of the job. Therefore, an effective orientation programme will initiate the employee to the organization.

In this stage an early job challenge should provide for positive long-term results. Early job challenge has the advantage of faster promotion to higher management positions and tends to motivate employees to further their education.

Feedback by supervisors are an important aspect of this stage as frequent constructive feedback enable new employees to feel accepted, develop competence and adjust their behaviour thus accelerating the learning process.

### **7.2.2 Achievement Stage**

Once security and acceptance have been established which lasts from age 30 to 45, there is now less concern for safety and more interest in achievement, esteem, and autonomy. The individual displays a desire for promotion and advancement in the organisation. In addition to the actions by the organisation, the individual is ready for responsibility towards his achievement. The organisation is responsible for constructing realistic and flexible career paths in lieu of the traditional career paths no longer being available in today's organisations.

The organisation also promotes self-assessment of its employees by introducing workshops, seminars on job opportunities. Adding to this the organization may develop a career management plan highlighting career goals via performance appraisals and constant feedback.

### 7.2.3 Maintenance Stage

The maintenance stage can be marked off by the efforts to stabilize the gains of the past. This encompasses a period of being creative having already satisfied psychological and financial needs with earlier phases. Esteem and self-actualisation are most important aspects of this phase.

The mid life stage is generally a time of reappraisal of the past and appraisal of long-term career plans in the assessment of real progress measure in terms of ambitions. Psychological benefits in midlife are more wisdom, more autonomy being less driven by instinctual drives, coming to terms with limitations having social concerns and a broader life perspective (Levinson et.al; 1978)

During the late thirties or early forties, a so-called mid life crisis can occur. In the mid life crisis some individuals once again have to contend with identity questions like "What have I achieved? Or where am I going?" The person stands on the delicate threshold between the outcomes of exploration, establishment, maintenance and the threat of decline. Researchers agree that the transition to the middle years can be just as critical and, in some respects, more agonising than adolescence (Sheehy, 1976)

With the shift from a traditional organisation to a more protean career concept it is important that organisations give employees a new career contract that is based on continuous learning versus retraining. The protean concept of career will give the individual the responsibility to meet specific mid career needs, that is acquiring new skills and a realistic self-assessment.

### 7.2.4 Retirement

Late adulthood is associated with retirement.

The retirement phase can be depicted by the completion from one career and moving off to another. The individual experiences a state of self-actualisation and may move into jobs of painting, gardening and volunteer work. It is a fact that an individual passes through various stages in their careers. Individuals have different needs. Their motives are different from one stage to the next. The management of careers allows an individual a complete description of what happens during these stages. Adjustment to retirement is also influenced by the degree of self-actualisation reached through the course of life.

Organisations can assist employees in preparing from the transition to retirement by encouraging them to accept themselves and broaden their interests and develop new skills by providing a phasing out programme.

Individuals whose identities are tied to their work will have difficulty adjusting to full time retirement and are likely to accept bridge employment i.e. part-time, temporary, short employment similar to their current work.

Life stages and career stages are intrinsically related, yet different stages; including both life and career aspects can be distinguished in terms of general characteristics, life tasks, needs and problematic issues. Changes in life and career aspects can be conducive to personal growth; psychological renewal and vitality that generate further development. Life/career stages involve the contexts of personal, societal and organisational structures.

## 8. MOTIVATION AND JOB SATISFACTION

In understanding the effect that a career plateau has on job satisfaction it is important to understand the need theories associated with job satisfaction. To this end, it is important to reflect on the contribution of Herzberg and Alderfer as they specify what motivates individuals (i.e. the contents of needs)

Because of the criticism to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Clayton Alderfer proposed an alternative, known as the ERG theory.

In essence, instead of the 5 levels, he condensed these into 3 levels, existence, relatedness and growth.

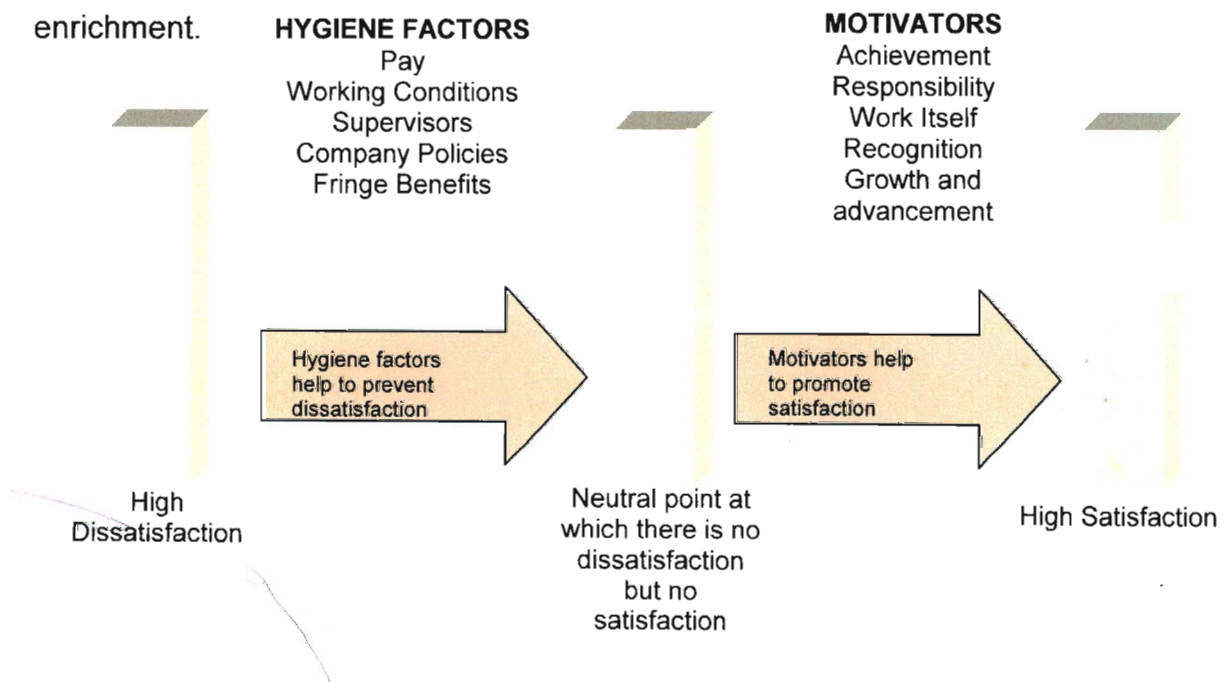
Existence needs include various forms of material and physiological desires, such as food and water, as well as work related forms as pay, fringe benefits, and physical working conditions. Relatedness needs are needs that address our relationships with significant others, such as families, friendship groups, work groups and professional groups. Growth needs are needs that impel creativity and innovation, along with the desire to have a productive impact on our surroundings.

ERG need levels differ in terms of concreteness, that is, the degree to which their presence or absence can be verified. The existence need level is the most concrete, relating to issues such as our rate of pay and the pleasantness of our work surroundings. The growth need level is the least concrete, involving more nebulous issues such as our level of creativity, the degree to which our capabilities are growing relative to our capacity, and the long term impact of our efforts on our organization.

In assimilation of the ERG needs, understanding the two-factor theory of Frederick Herzberg, Herzberg conducted a survey between participants to ascertain and describe situations where they felt satisfied and highly motivated and those in which they felt dissatisfied or unmotivated. When they

described motivating situations, Herzberg called these factors satisfiers or motivators, noting that they relate mainly to the content of the job. On the other hand, when they talked about situations in which they felt unmotivated, they talked about working conditions and supervision. Herzberg called these factors dissatisfiers, or hygiene factors, pointing out that these are largely associated with the work environment.

On the basis of this, Herzberg developed a two-factor theory of motivation, which argues that potential rewards fit into two categories, hygiene factor and motivators, each having different implications for employee motivation. Hygiene factors are important to keep workers from being dissatisfied, but no amount of hygiene factors will ever lead to work satisfaction and motivation. Instead to have satisfied, and motivated employees managers need to ensure that ample motivators are available. They can do this changing the nature of jobs so that they include opportunities for achievement, challenge, responsibility, growth and other motivators. Herzberg called this process job enrichment.



**Fig 6: Herzberg's Two Factor Theory**

## 9. CAREER PLATEAUIING

Given the downsizing mentality that has characterised most large organizations over the past several years, career development and planning have been de-emphasized in some firms as employees wondered if they would even have jobs, much less careers.

Many reasons have been identified as causing plateauing including inappropriate skills/abilities, stress and burnout, flatter organizations, slow company growth and even slower economic growth.

Companies that ignore career issues are mistaken if they think the issue will somehow go away. Some of the reasons cited below explain this:-

- ❑ Rising concerns for quality of work life and for personal life planning in individuals today.
- ❑ Equal employment opportunity legislation and workforce diversity pressures have strengthened the need for proper career development initiatives.
- ❑ Rising educational levels and occupational inspirations, coupled with
- ❑ Slow economic growth and reduced advancement opportunities have caused concerns for organisations and individuals alike.

Career plateauing is one such concern that can be defined as the point in a career when the likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very low (Liebowitz et al. 1990:28). In addition, there is agreement within business today that plateauing is characterised by the absence of career movement in any direction.

## 9.1 Subjective and Objectives Plateaus

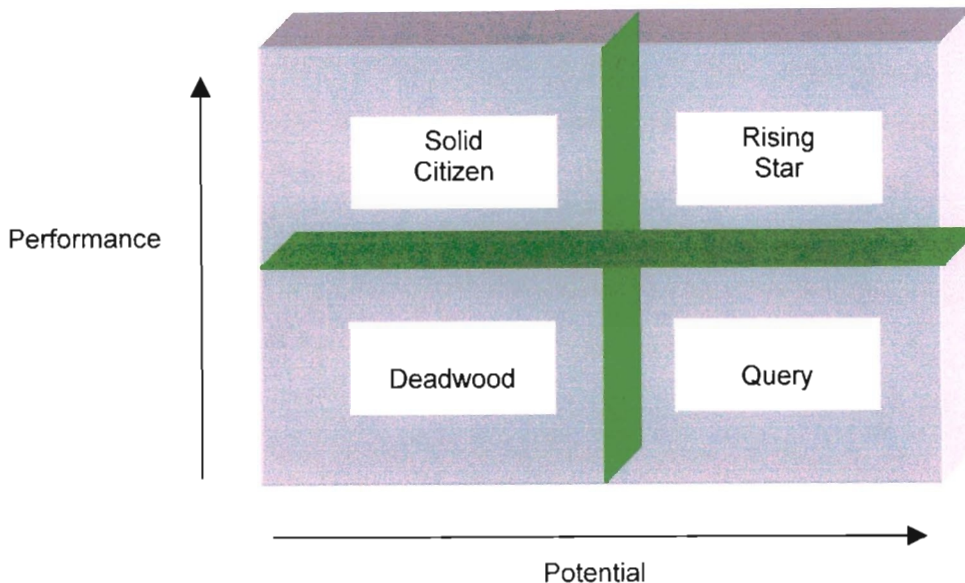
When an individual who is otherwise qualified for a higher position cannot move up because higher-level openings are lacking, the person is sometimes said to be organizationally plateaued. Others may be plateaued by personal choice or because their performance and/or qualifications do not warrant their promotions.

Career plateaus can be both subjective and objective. The subjective aspects are linked to self-perception. When people perceive they have reached a plateau, their careers are sometimes so affected that their conviction becomes self-fulfilling.

At the same time, employees who might appear to others to be “plateauing” aren’t necessarily unhappy or inferior. Human resource management research has long recognized that “levelling-off” periods are healthy and productive in an adult’s development. In other words, the so-called plateau could represent a period of stability, where employees master work skills, pursue special family or personal interests, and improve functional, professional, and personal skills so that they can contribute more to their organizations.

The objective side of career plateaus relates to the fact that they can be observed, even analysed by others. Observable measurements, like future prospects for promotion, length of time in present position, or length of time between promotions, but such classifications are, at best, incomplete. They ignore, for example, the person who is happy with his or her current position and deliberately foregoes promotions, the person who retains a title but is given added responsibility, and even the person who is “kicked upstairs” --- promoted but with curtailed responsibilities. Such personal twists obfuscate objective measurements of career plateaus.

## 10. LIFE STAGE THEORIES OF PLATEAUING AND SUCCESSION



**Figure 7: Categorisation – performance / potential**

There are 4 major managerial states that are founded on the 2 parameters of succession planning i.e. current performance and future potential or the likelihood of future promotions.

The rising stars are people with potential, who will benefit from career planning, wider experience and management training. The organisation may wish to 'fast track' them by rapid promotion or by offering more challenging opportunities. They should be listed and looked after. This may mean paying over the odds to demonstrate that the company values them and wants to keep them from straying further afield. It does mean setting up a row of crown princes whose future is guaranteed and whose path to the top is made easy. They have to know that they have only been given these opportunities because they have performed well so far, and that the demands made on them in the future are going to be even greater. There is no easy way to the top and they must realize that they will have to work their passage, and that, while the company has its eye on them and is going to help their development, in the last analysis it will be up to them.

The solid citizens are the people to whom the organization depends on getting things done. They are the backbone of the organization. They are not necessarily going to rise much above their present level, but they are useful and dependable and they still need training in new techniques and skills. They also need the encouragement and motivation provided by varying their responsibilities, introducing new opportunities wherever this can be arranged, and assuring them that they are doing a worthwhile job.

The queries are those people who for one reason or another do not seem to be making the grade. They may have the ability but not the motivation, or they may have the motivation but not the ability. In the latter case it is worth trying to establish and satisfy training needs. They are clearly worth saving, if this is at all possible. People with ability who lack motivation may present a bigger problem. It is a good thing to find out why they are not motivated and do something about it.

The deadwoods are the people – one hopes few in number, if they exist at all, who ought to go. As long as else in the shape of training and encouragement has failed, there is no point in keeping them – for their sake as well as that of the company. They could do better elsewhere if they can find a nice square hole into which they will fit.

The values of society change over time, and consequently, how a person reacts to a career may be modified. Today, a growing number of people who are in managerial and professional careers seem less obsessed with advancement, continual success, and a continually increasing salary. Family needs and spending time off the job with loved ones are becoming topics that individuals are discussing and considering more completely.

## **10.1 Determinants of a Career Plateau**

Factors of vertical mobility can be divided into two broad categories: individual and familial factors on the one side, and organizational factors on the other side.

The first are linked to the specific situations of the individual's themselves: Because of a lack of skills, of will, of ambition, or because of certain external constraints, some may remain in their current job or at their current level despite job opportunities that may become available. The second set of factors usually has little to do with the individual per se. These are contextual or structural factors that effectively block the chances of advancement and are reflected by a lack of job openings on higher levels.

### **10.1.1 Factors contributing to Career Plateauing**

#### **a) Organisational Sources**

The pyramidal shape of an organization is the most important source of plateauing. Nowadays, fewer jobs are available with each incremental step up the ladder. Barwick (1986) referred to the "rule of 99%" to point out that only 1% of employees will reach the highest level of corporate decision-making. Therefore it can be concluded that career plateauing is largely as a result of limited spaces in the organisational hierarchy.

#### **10.1.1.1 Impact of the economic environment**

The bulge of baby boomers has made climbing the hierarchy much more competitive, and the flattening of organisational structures has reduced the number of management positions just as the number of candidates has increased. This has caused a great deal of frustration as today's middle aged employees see themselves failing to advance as rapidly as they had expected.

The recent torpid economy, coupled with a wave of mergers, acquisitions, bankruptcies, and leveraged buy-outs, however has prompted the restructuring, downsizing, and de-layering of corporate, educational, and governmental organizations in the early 1990s. This has reduced the number

of upper level management positions available to Americans in those organizations. In effect, foreign involvement has created an impenetrable career barrier for most American Managers (Allen, Tammy D; Poteet, Mark L)

#### **10.1.1.2 Organizational Posture**

Internal strategic decisions, or even the nature of a corporation's business, can influence an employee's likelihood of becoming plateaued. To explain this two types of organisations i.e. Defender organizations and analyser organizations influence the rate of plateauing between employees in these kind of organizations. A defender corporation is more mature in its product lines, tends to be more entrenched competitively, and relies on increased efficiency, financial manoeuvring and sound production methods to maintain profitability. In contrast, an analyser corporation relies on new product development, expended sales, and the development of new markets in order to be profitable. According to (Slocum, Cron, Hansen and Rawlings: 1985) it was reported that the likelihood of plateaued employees is greater in defender organizations than analyser corporations.

#### **10.1.1.3 Organisational Culture**

The organizational culture (as exemplified by performance standards and expectations) organizational climate (open and supportive vs. autocratic, tense and stressful) and communication patterns all play a role concerning the organization's impact on career plateauing (Slocum, Cron & Yows, 1987)

The manner in which the organization handles employee career movement, be it lateral-internal reassignment, geographic transfer, or termination, affects the morale of all employees and may increases the difficulty of preventing solid citizens from deteriorating into dead wood.

Organizations may lose valuable opportunities for improving employee performance when executives do not recognize the importance of solid citizens and their contributions to the stability and the continuity of the organization.

(Ferenze et al: 1977) concluded that an employee's perception of contributing to the organization was genuinely important and receiving such confirmation of the contribution from organisational leaders was a significant means of promoting worker job satisfaction. Regrettably, ineffective plateaued workers (deadwood) are more likely to be the recipients of organisational attention than are solid citizens.

#### **10.1.1.4 The Specific job and Supervisor**

Because supervisors exert real and anticipated power to an extent achieved by few others, they can influence the quality of the work that employees perform as well as their attitudes about the job.

Although supervisors do not directly cause or prevent career plateauing, their efforts can enhance worker satisfaction and promote career advancement. The work climate created by a supervisor can help avert some of the negative consequences of plateauing when it does occur. Emphasis on personal growth and the worth of the individual lends itself to de-emphasize upward mobility and refocusing on aspects of the work itself (rather than promotion). (Karp: 1989) suggested, " It doesn't matter when growth occurs. If employees are growing through off the job activities, they will bring that growth and added energy to the job"

#### **b) Individual employee variables**

The extent to which the pyramidal shape of an organization dominates the probability of career plateauing allows the individual employee little power to avert career plateauing and underscores the importance of using every available opportunity the employee has to offset the likelihood, or delay the arrival of the plateaued terminus.

10.2 Plateaued Performers

Liebowitz et. Al (1990) identify the following four kinds of plateaued performers:

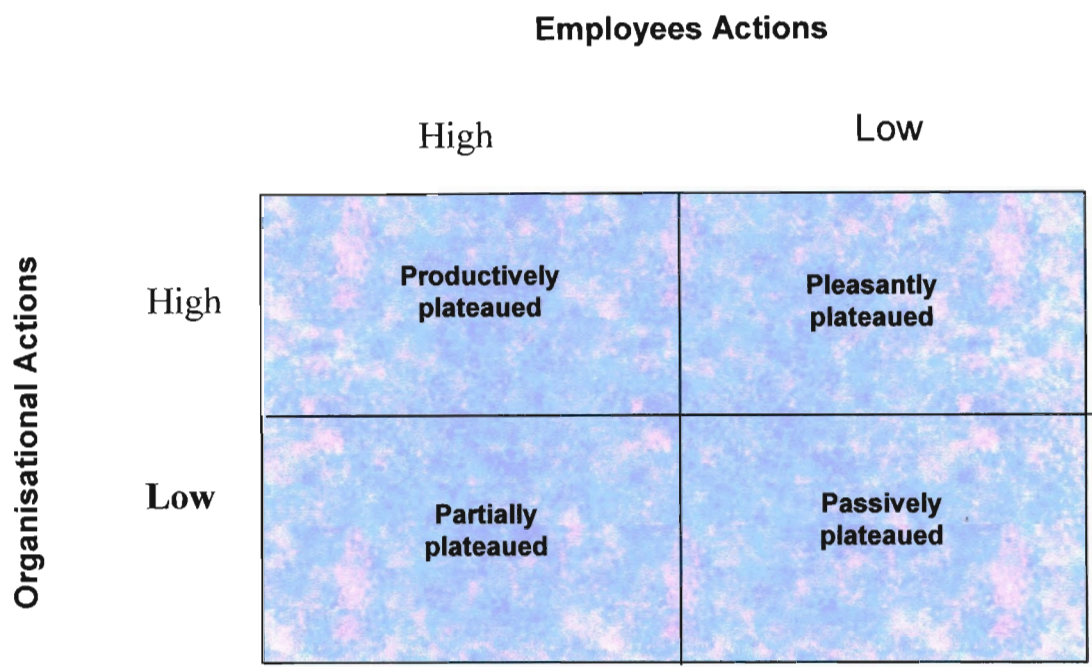


Fig 8: Four kinds of plateaued performers

10.2.1 Productively plateaued

Such employees and organisations try hard to encourage stimulation and challenge. The employees feel that they have achieved their ambitions and experience job satisfaction. They are proactive and willing to take risks, and are supported in this by their organisations.

They are loyal to their organisations and regard themselves as indispensable. Their efforts are recognised by their colleagues and supervisors. They are productive and they perform, but they need to be motivated.

### **10.2.2 Partially plateaued**

These employees feel that the organisation does not do much for them, but they usually have an interest that maintains their involvement in the job. These people are usually experts in their field, but although they are valued by their organisations, the job seems routine to them. They always appreciate new opportunities to learn, because these maintain the excitement.

### **10.2.3 Pleasantly plateaued**

These employees are not interested in training courses and opportunities for advancement offered by their organisation. They are happy to be where they are and do not welcome change. They like to have a routine and a well-defined place within the organisation. They usually stay with one organisation for a long time, but are not innovators.

### **10.2.4 Passively plateaued**

Such employees feel that they are in a rut and unable to alter that fact. They have usually been in the same job for more than 5 years and know it thoroughly, leaving little opportunity for learning. These people are neither curious nor creative and have no interest in the training courses provided by their organisations. They do not initiate change and have a narrow definition of their own jobs.

## **11. METHODOLOGY**

### **11.1 Research Design**

The aim of this research was to determine the perceptions of career plateauing among employees of Company A (Company A). The hypothesis was to test the degree to which this perception of plateauing was linked to job satisfaction and motivation levels of these employees.

In achieving the above, it was decided that a quantitative study would be most appropriate. Two questionnaires were administered to employees. The data was collected in the form of a cross-sectional study i.e. Snapshot of one point in time.

The research design was made of descriptive statistics that is data preparation and then preparing a descriptive statistical summary for analysing and conclusions.

### **11.2 Sampling**

#### **11.2.1 Population**

The study focused on employees of Company A, who were employed for a number of years ranging from 20 years.

Employees that made up the population group emanated from all departments with the company i.e. the Assessing department, Membership department and the Customer Services department.

### **11.2.2 Sample**

The sample included 50 staff members who were used to partake in the survey. Their ages varied between 20 and 55 years old. A cross section of ages and sexes were used. It was felt that a varied response such as this would be beneficial to the study. The employees were from different positions at different grades in the organisation. Respondents were English speaking.

### **11.2.3 Sampling method**

Considering the nature of the study a convenient sampling method was used. This enabled a timeous response rate and caused least disruption to work.

### **11.2.4 Data Collection**

The organisation in which the research was conducted was useful for the following reasons:-

The author is employed in a Managerial capacity. She has access to information, processes and could gauge the general climate of the company. The familiarity with respondents allowed for greater co-operation in obtaining a sample.

The organisation is currently undergoing restructuring, job changes, re-deployment which affected morale and the motivation level of employees, therefore career plateauing was a plausible aspect of study and Company A was a suitable case study.

### **11.2.5 Questionnaire Design**

2 Questionnaires were administered to the sample population:-

- a) Job Satisfaction Questionnaire
- b) Career Plateauing Questionnaire

The surveys measured aspects such as :-

- Promotion
- Personal advancement
- Development
- Culture of Company A
- Loyalty towards Company A
- Investment in Human Resources
- Rewarding performance
- Upward Mobility

A Likert scale was used to measure responses.

- |   |   |                   |
|---|---|-------------------|
| 1 | - | Strongly Agree    |
| 2 | - | Agree             |
| 3 | - | Unsure            |
| 4 | - | Disagree          |
| 5 | - | Strongly Disagree |

The more 1s and 2s one scored, the more the individual was in agreement with what was being measured i.e. his perception of being plateaued was strong/er and his measure of happiness/unhappiness about what he feels about his job.

3 – denoted a stage of being “unsure” which basically assumed that a person was neither in agreement nor in disagreement but rather chose to balance the rate by choosing a score of 3.

The more 4s and 5s one scored, the more the individual was in disagreement with what was being measured i.e. his perception of being plateaued was less/er or in the case of 5 – he strongly disagreed with the sentiments of career plateauing or unhappiness with his job i.e. he was happy with his job and was not perceiving that he was plateaued at work.

### **11.3 Analysis of the data**

The raw data produced from the questionnaires were processed to exact a meaning. After the surveys were completed the responses were coded. The data was then edited and captured onto the SPSS statistical package. Statistical analysis involves the summation of data in order to describe and interpret the data. This therefore equipped the researcher to generalize and make inferences. The analysis was done through descriptive and inferential statistics.

#### **11.3.1 Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics use a single number to summarise data. Due to the design of the questionnaire, this was done through two basic tendencies i.e. central tendency and the mode.

#### **11.3.2 Inferential Statistics**

Frequency distribution – is the spread of data over the various categories. The distribution pattern of data was represented graphically to provide a clearer understanding and interpretation of the data.

### **11.4 Correlation**

Bivariate Correlation's were used to display descriptive stats for each variable. Persons Correlation's were used. P Values – significance levels were gauged for data (0.01) – one-tailed tests were used to indicate direction of relationships and strength of relationships.

### **11.5 Reliability**

Reliability has to do with the accuracy and precision of a measurement procedure (Schindler, Cooper, 2001). It was difficult to assess the quality of the data gathered. It was easier to assess the accuracy of the survey instrument and the process undertaken to collect the data.

The questionnaires – were constructed in a very short and concise manner to prevent misinterpretation and any ambiguity. The language was simple and easy to understand.

### **11.6 Validity**

Refers to the extent to which a test measures what we actually wish to measure (Schindler, Cooper, 2001). The survey population, employees at Company A, was small. Due to constraints the sample size was limited to 50. A major problem concerning the sampling method is that the reliability of the research is low as a totally different sample is likely to be selected in the event of further research being conducted. However at face validity, this is a plausible research topic that deals with the subject matter comprehensively.

### **11.7 Frequencies**

A frequency across all variables of questionnaire 1 and 2 was done to gauge N-no of respondents, validity, mean, standard deviations of each variable. This was important to investigate the relationships between variables such as Age, Sex, Date employed, Job tenure in respect to the perception of Job Satisfaction and Career Plateauing.

### **11.8 Internal consistency of Instrument**

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the degree to which instrument items were homogenous and reflected the same underlying constructs. A value greater than 0.5 usually indicates good internal consistency. For the instrument as a whole, Cronbach's alpha was 0.8101

Job Satisfaction Questionnaire – 0.7526

Career Plateauing Questionnaire – 0.9218

The above indicate that there is a very good internal consistency of questions. See Appendix C.

12. RESULTS

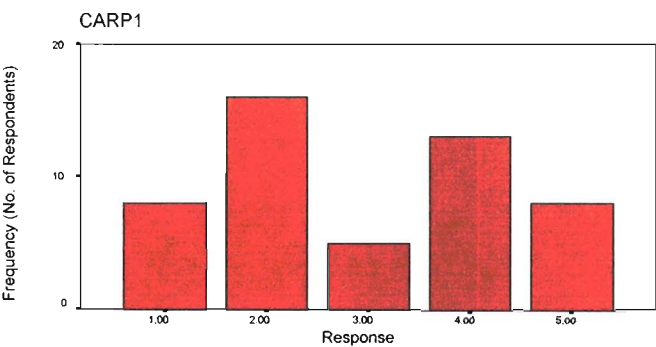
12.1 Career Plateauing Questionnaire Results

The results below show the responses received on each question surveyed. A detailed analysis is carried out in section 13.

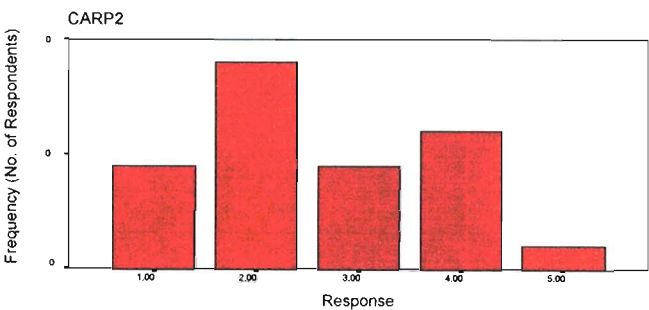
A Likert scale was used to measure responses.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Unsure
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

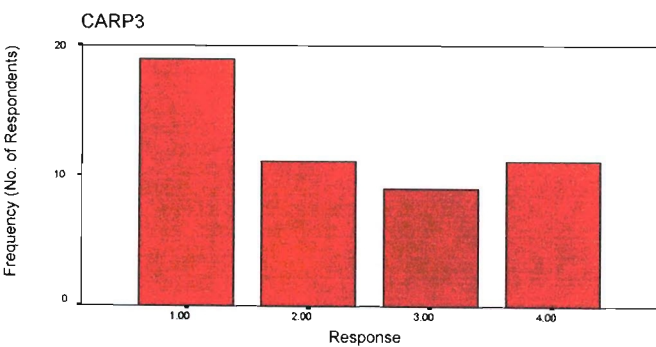
1. I have been passed over for promotion in my company.



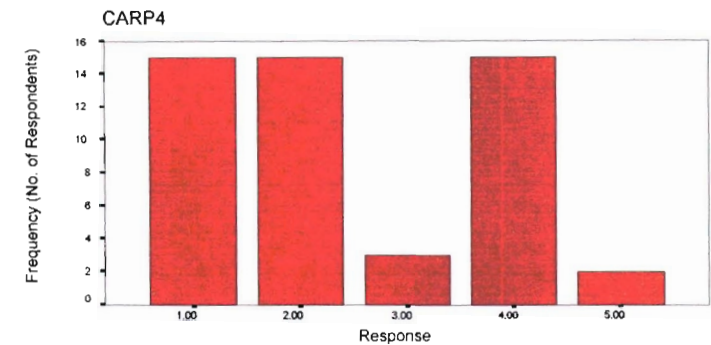
2. I have stagnated in my current job.



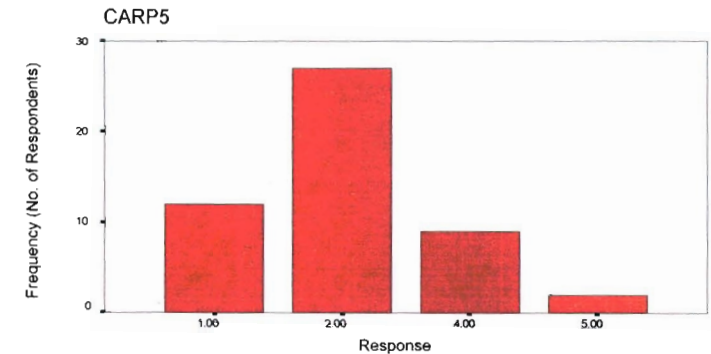
3. There is not much scope for advancement for me in this organisation.



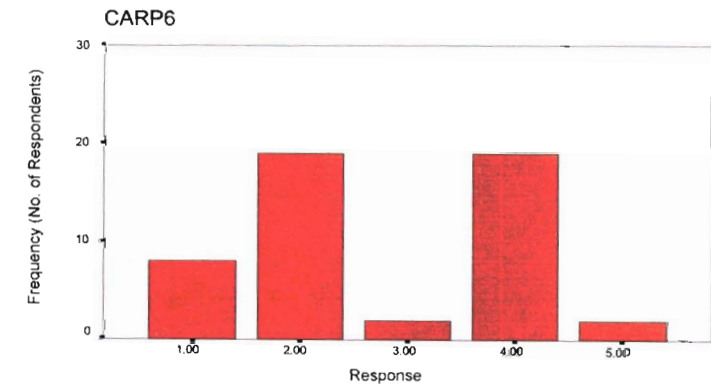
4. I am frustrated by my lack of promotion here



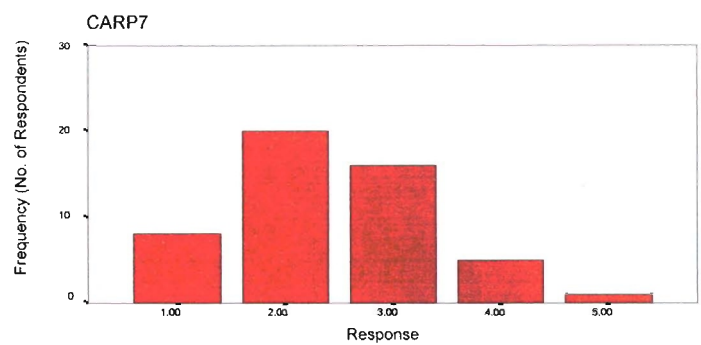
5. There are not many opportunities for personal advancement in this company



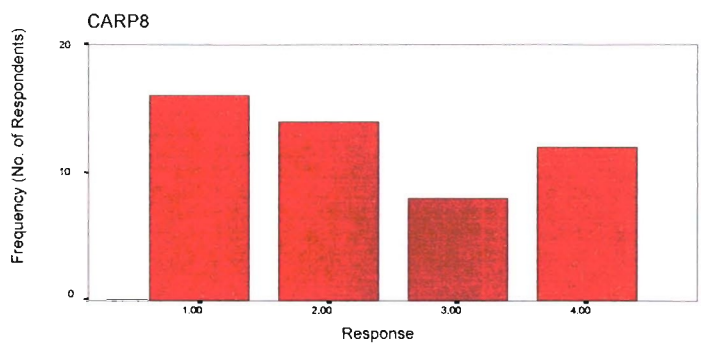
6. I have been doing my current job for too long



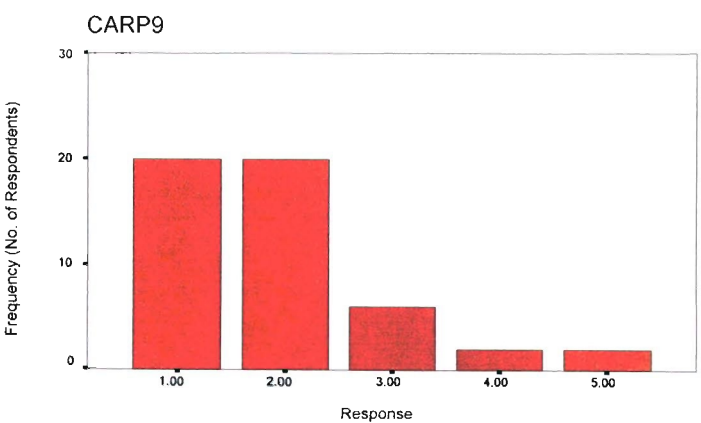
7. People who get promoted do not deserve their promotion



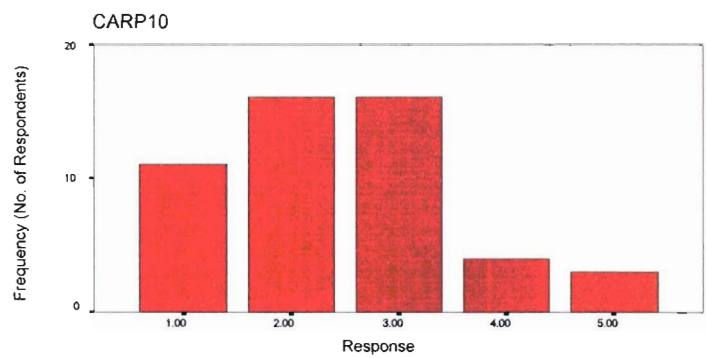
8. I am not worried about further promotion in this company



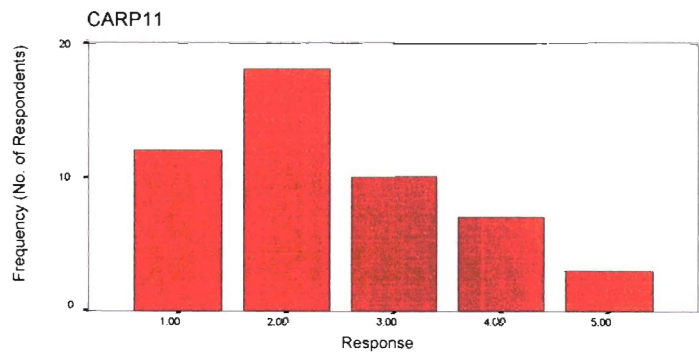
9. I am happy to do the job that I am doing now for the rest of my life



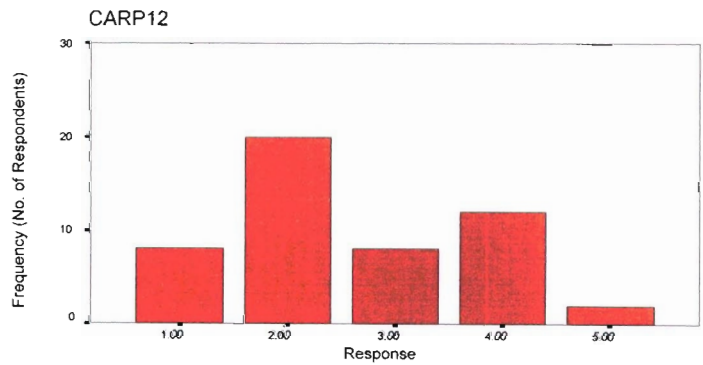
10. I don't think it is likely I will be promoted in the company in the foreseeable future



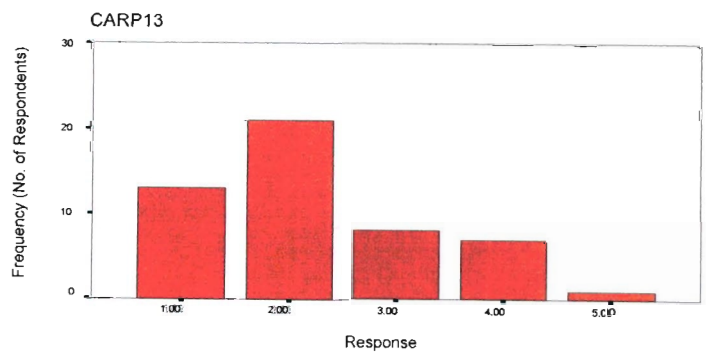
11. Lack of personal advancement in this company is something I find difficult to tolerate



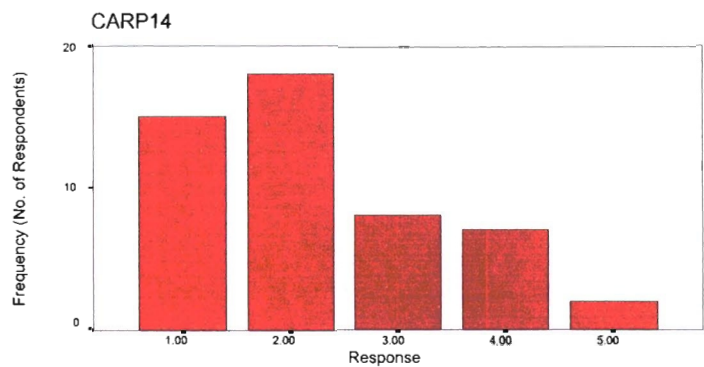
12. The company doesnot have a suitable development programme for its employees



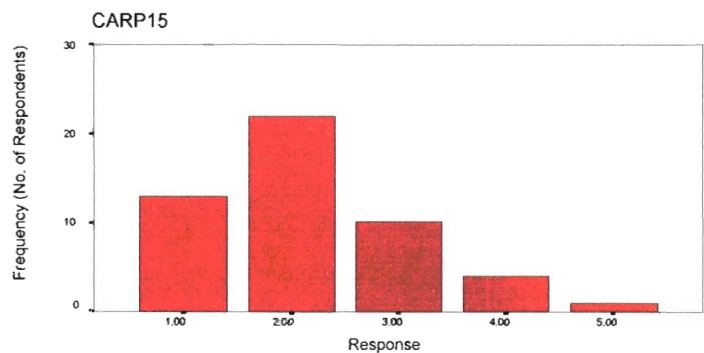
13. Promotions are based on who you know in this organisation



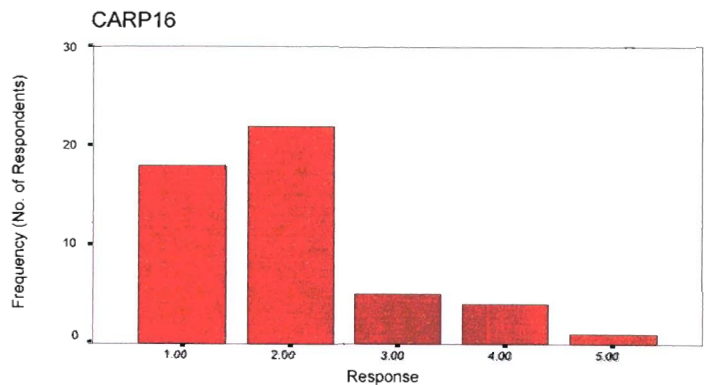
14. The company looks at external applicants for a job instead of developing internal resources.



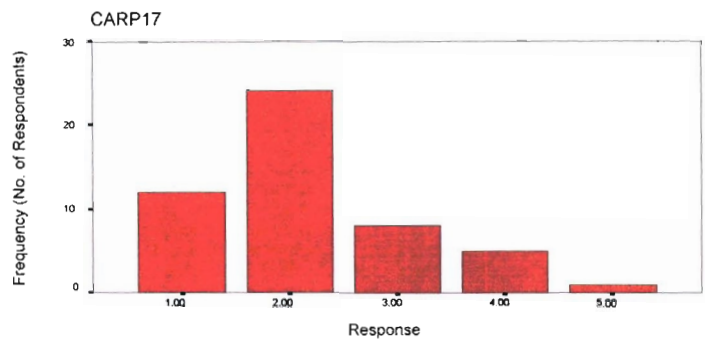
15. The company is not concerned for the advancement of the quality of Human Resources i.e. those with good qualifications and experience



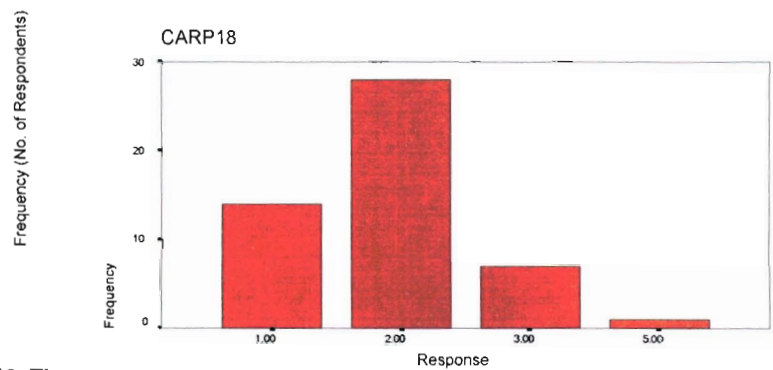
16. The company does not have a clear policy aimed at rewarding performance.



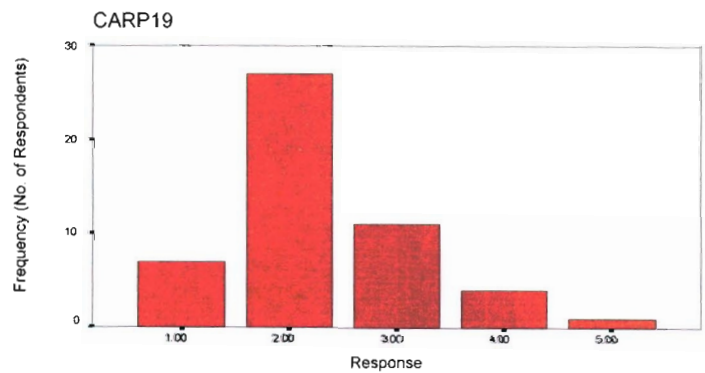
17. The company doesnot have a sense of loyalty towards its employees.



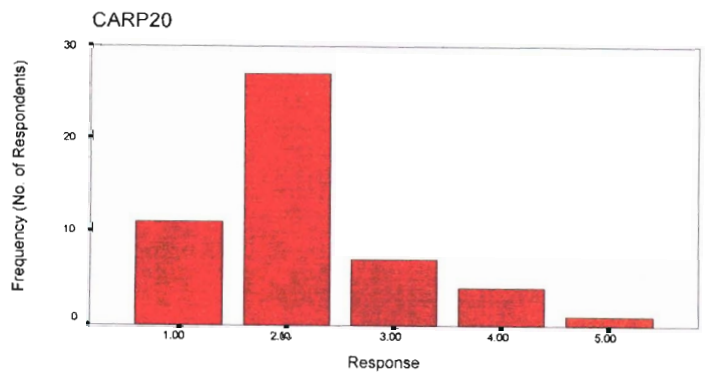
18. The company should invest more in its quality of Human Resources



19. Th... in the organisation

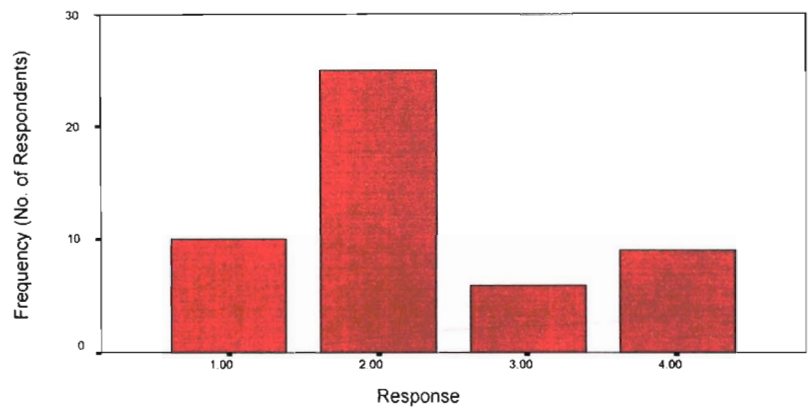


20. The culture of the organisation does not facilitate the upward advancement of its individuals

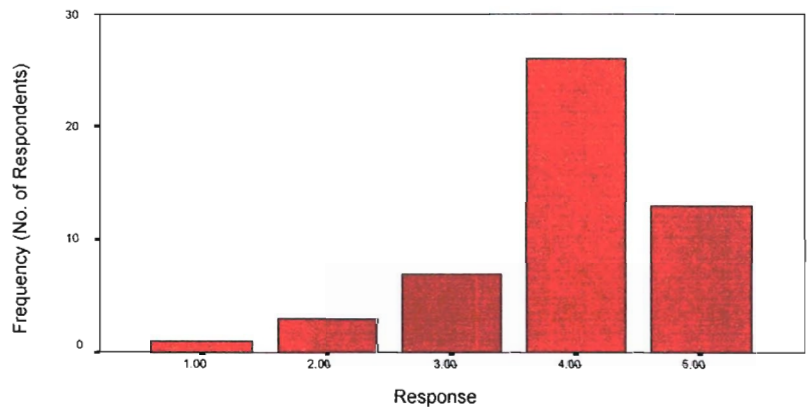


12.2 Job Satisfaction Questionnaire

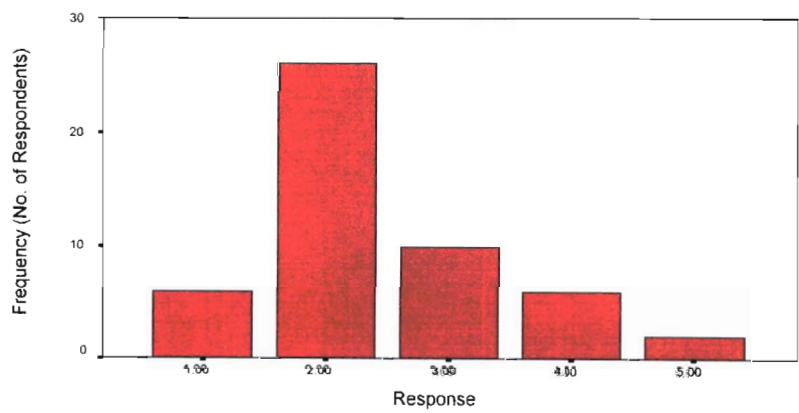
1. On most days I do not feel satisfied with my job.



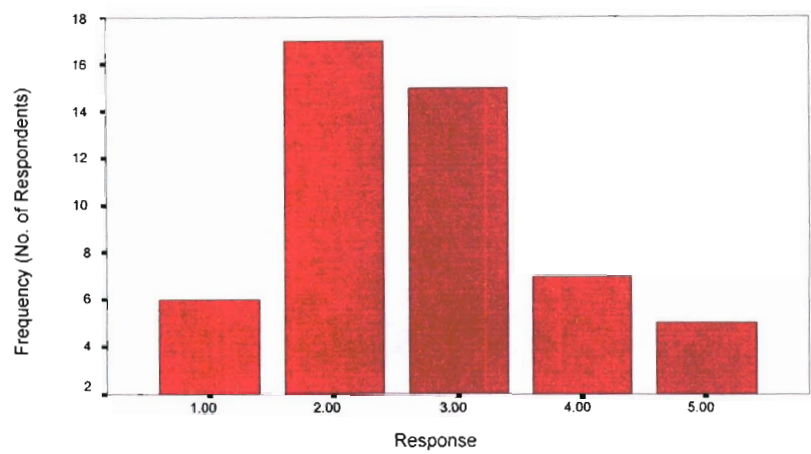
2. I dislike my job.



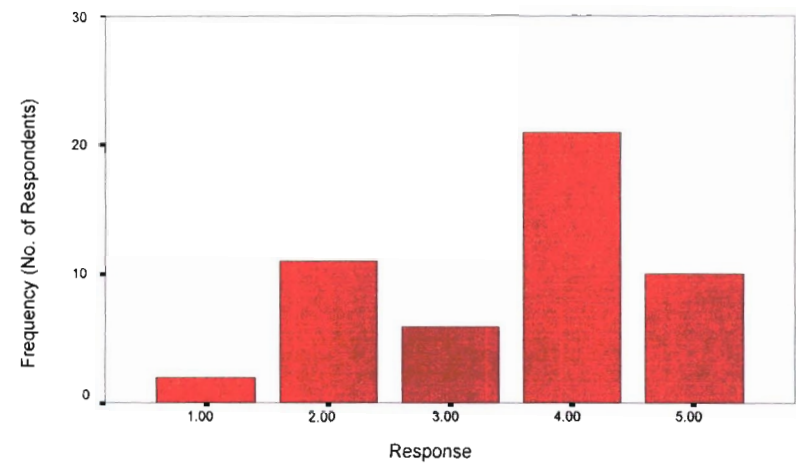
3. I am not enthusiastic about my job.



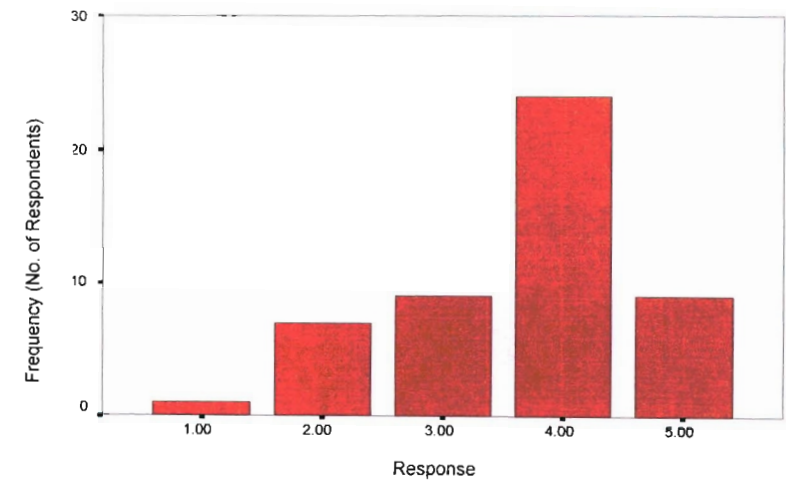
4. I would quit this job at once if I could.



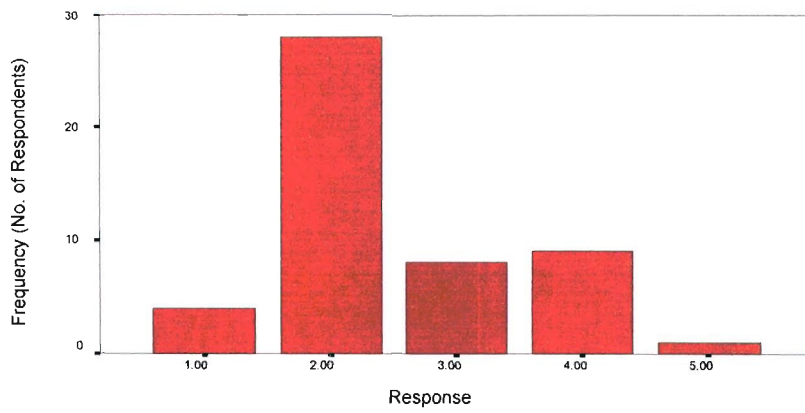
5. I would like to change my job for another one.



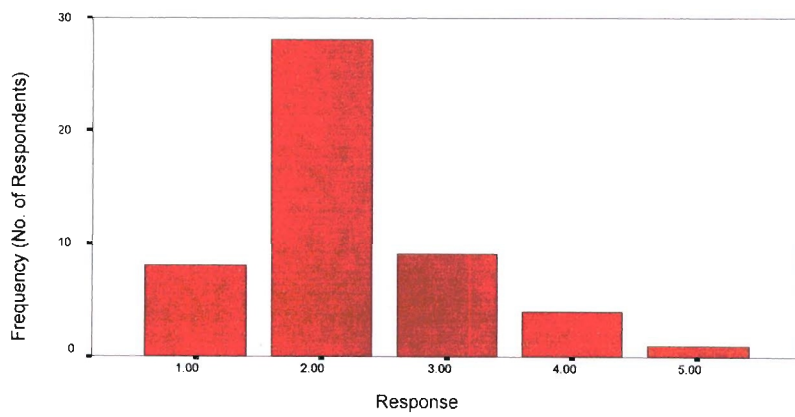
6. I have no growth in my job.



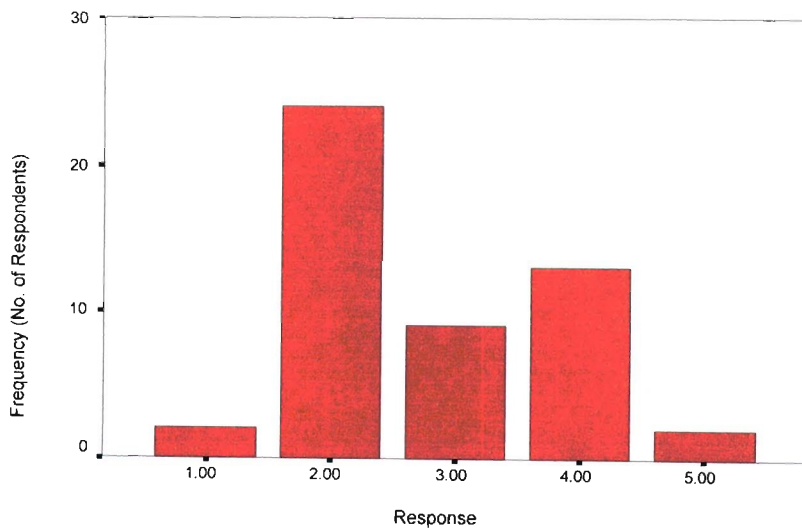
**7. I dislike my job more than other people dislike theirs**



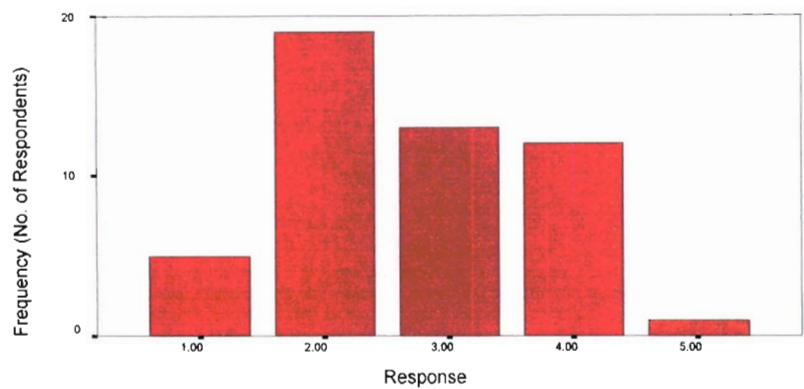
**8. Basically, I don't like my job**



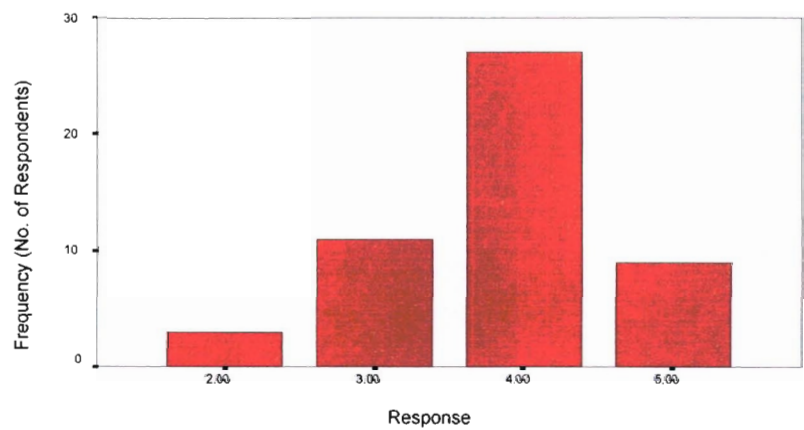
**9. All in all, I feel dissatisfied with my job**



10. I do not find real enjoyment in my job.



11. I would consider taking another job.



### 13. RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED

#### 13.1 Analysis of Career Plateauing being linked to Age

##### Background

This questionnaire measured how employees rated aspects such as promotion, personal advancement, development, loyalty, rewarding performance, upward mobility within Company A.

Perceptions of career plateauing were measured using the 20 items relating to promotional opportunities and their career futures. Items were anchored on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 – Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

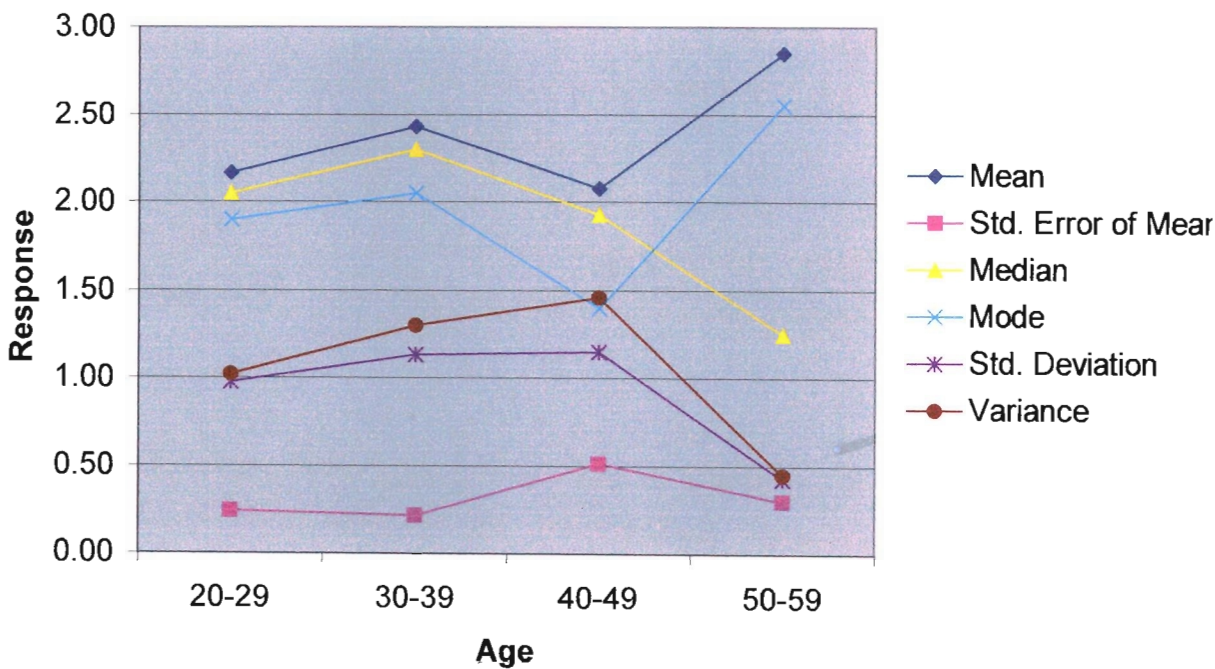


Figure 9.1 Responses to Various Age categories

As per figure 13.1, the career plateauing questionnaire responses were surveyed amongst groups of people aged 20-29, 30-39, 40-49 and 50-59.

The 20 questions were analysed against each age group.

For age group 20-29 there were 16 subjects.

For age group 30-39 there were 27 subjects.

For age group 40-49 there were 5 subjects.

For age group 50-59 there were 2 subjects.

The average for all questions answered for age group 20-29 = 2.17, 30-39 = 2.43, 40-49 = 2.01 and 50-59 = 2.85

The mode or most frequently occurring score for all questions answered for age group 20-29 = 1.90, 30-39 = 2.05, 40-49 = 1.40 and 50-59 = 2.55

From the above it is clear that employees in all age groups were in agreement (2-Agree) with the statements on the questionnaire. The statements emphasised that there was a lack of promotion, no clear hierarchical structure within the company, poor career planning, no investment in human resources, no policy aimed at rewarding performance.

The overall mode score was (2-Agree) which further emphasises that a perception of plateauing exists with the staff at Company A in all age groups.

## **Analysis**

1. Theorists have stated that a perception of plateauing increases with age, i.e. the older staff are, the stronger their impression of having reached a plateau. This can be concluded in respect to age groups 40-59 which is reiterated with scores of a 2-average and 1.40-mode respectively.
2. The data also concluded that a perception of plateauing at Company A exists among all age groups i.e. career plateauing is not restrictive to older / mature staff. What is clear is that individuals are perceiving that they are plateauing in their careers. This is a subjective view reflecting the perception, assessment, and their reactions to their present work situations.

3. An implication for Company A management is to consider the factors that are affecting staff members. An overall impression of plateauing is a serious implication for management. Recommendations will be discussed in length and strategies for overcoming these perceptions need to be targeted to the various groups factoring in life cycle and career stage cycles i.e. how old is the employee and at what career stage is he at i.e. growth, establishment or decline etc.

## **13.2 Analysis of Job satisfaction being linked to Age**

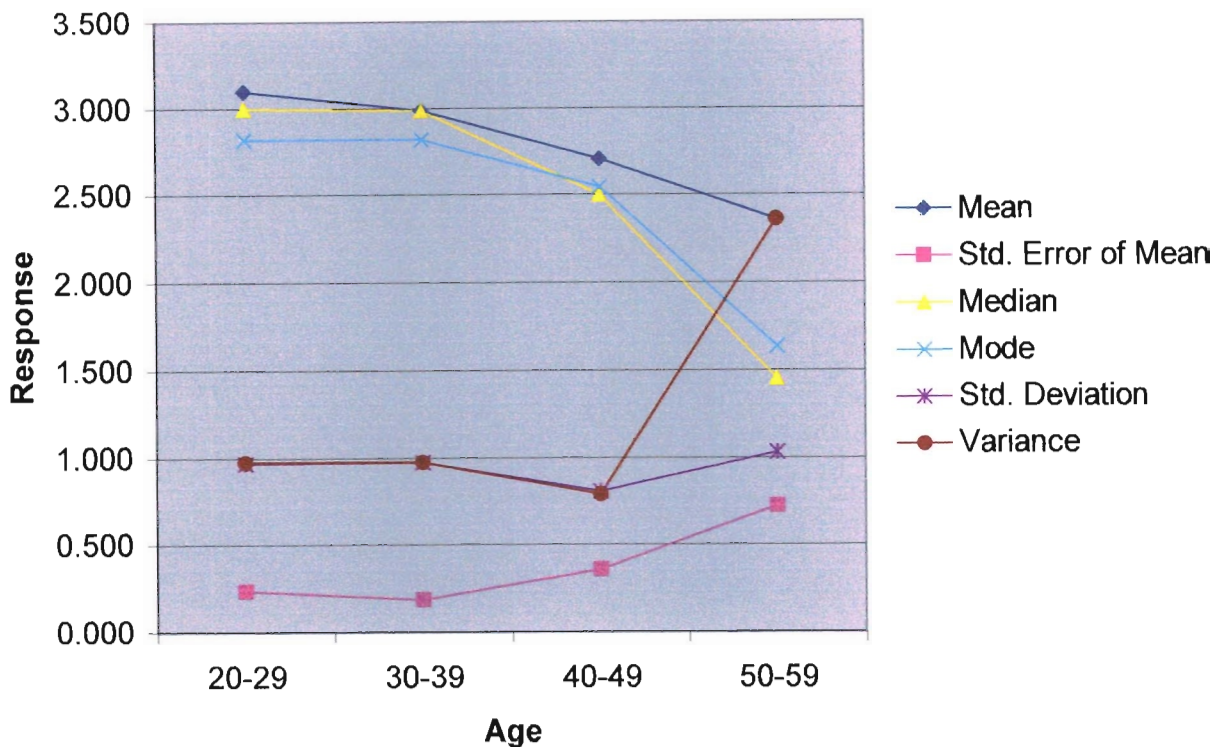
### **Background**

#### **“How do you feel about your Job”**

It is important to interpret recorded levels of job satisfaction within the context of the respondent's social environment. It has been argued that the organisation can benefit from improving the levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

This questionnaire measured how employees felt about their jobs. Aspects rated included employee motivation levels, job satisfaction indexes, enthusiasm, and the general mood in respect to what individuals perceived about their jobs.

In trying to surmise the data, it is important to highlight the following statistical analysis that supports the findings.



**Figure 9.2 Responses to Various Age categories**

The job satisfaction questionnaire responses were surveyed amongst groups of people aged 20-29, 30-39, 40-49 and 50-59.

The 11 questions were each analysed against each age group for analysis.

The average for all questions answered for age group 20-29 = 3.097, 30-39 = 2.987, 40-49 = 2.709 and 50-59 = 2.364

The mode or most frequently occurring score for all questions answered for age group 20-29 = 2.818, 30-39 = 2.818, 40-49 = 2.545 and 50-59 = 1.636

### Analysis

1. In respect to Job Satisfaction and Age groups – the average i.e. the measure of central tendency around the sample is (3-Unsure) on the Likert scale.
2. Employees were unsure about whether they were satisfied or not satisfied in respect to their jobs. The overall mode score was also (3-Unsure) The scores are leaning fro 2-3 which further indicate that an

agreement to the sentiments expressed i.e. Employees were in agreement with most of the statements that iterated sentiments such as dislike of job, no real enjoyment in job, not enthusiastic about their jobs, and found no real enjoyment in their jobs.

- 3. It is important to highlight that this average obtained did not reflect any 4s or 5s, which indicate a Disagree or Strongly Disagree score.

13.3 Analysis of Career Plateauing being linked to Male Age Groups

The career plateauing questionnaire was analysed against SEX i.e. male and female to ascertain whether a relationship exists between the two variables.

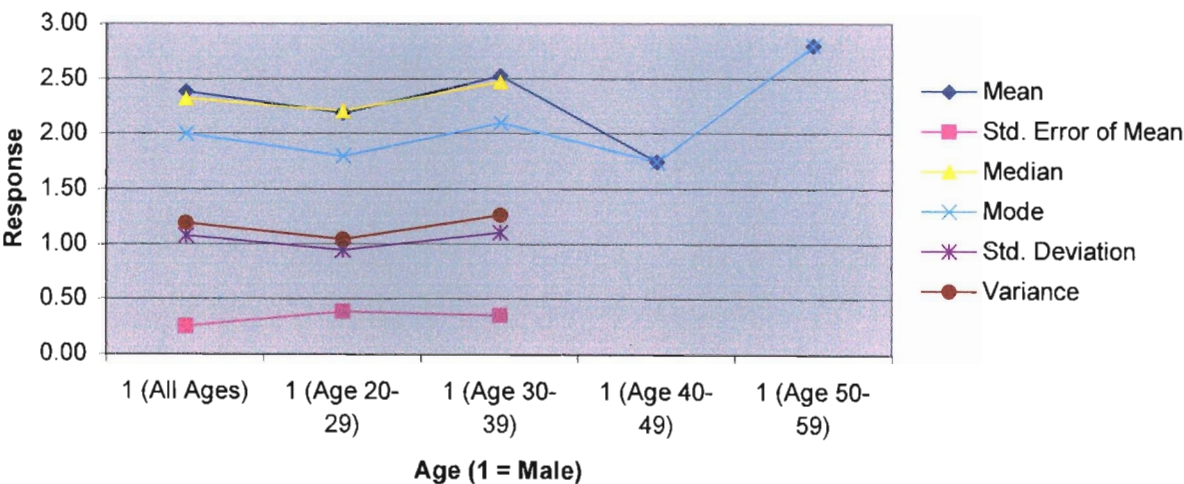


Figure 9.3 Responses to Various Male Age Groups

The career plateauing questionnaires were further analysed against the two sexes i.e. male (1) and female (2). There were 18 subjects that were male and 32 subjects that were female.

The average for all questions relating to career plateauing answered for males = 2.39. The above average was further broken down into males between the ages of 20-29 = 2.19, between 30-39 = 2.53, between 40-49 = 1.75 and 50-59 = 2.80

The mode for all males that answered the questions achieved an overall score of 2. This was further broken down into ages of 20-29 = 1.80, between 30-39 = 2.10, between 40-49 = 1.75 and 50-59 = 2.80

Of note, the overall average for both sexes was (2-Agree) i.e. the perception of being plateaued existed for both sexes.

13.4 Analysis of Career Plateauing being linked to Female Age Groups

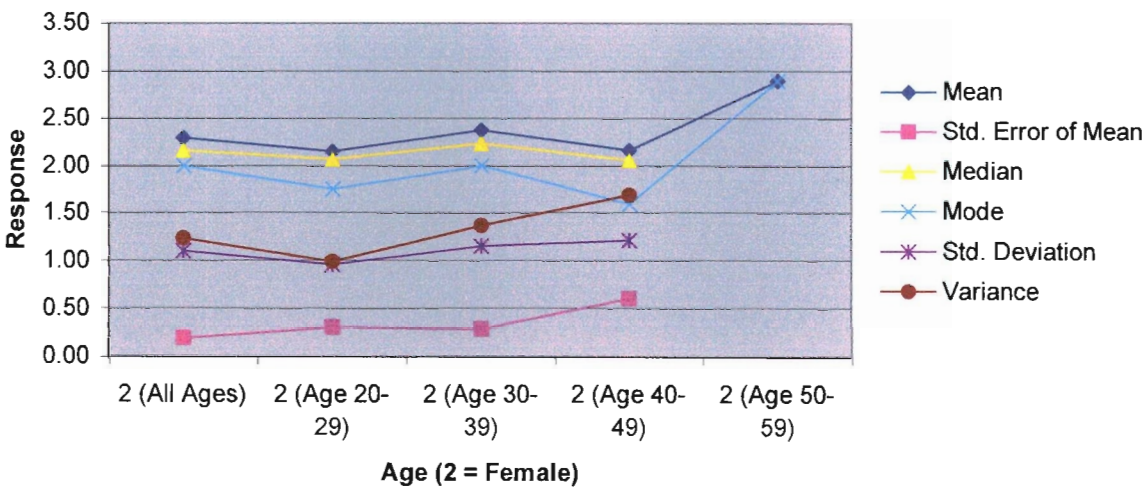


Figure 9.4 Responses to Various Female Age Groups

The career plateauing questionnaires were further analysed against the two sexes i.e. male (1) and female (2).

The average for all questions relating to career plateauing answered for females =2.29. The above average was further broken down into females between the ages of 20-29 = 2.15, between 30-39 = 2.37, between 40-49 = 2.16 and 50-59 = 2.90. The overall mode achieved was 2, further broken down into ages of 20-29 = 1.75, between 30-39 = 2, between 40-49 = 1.60 and 50-59 = 2.90

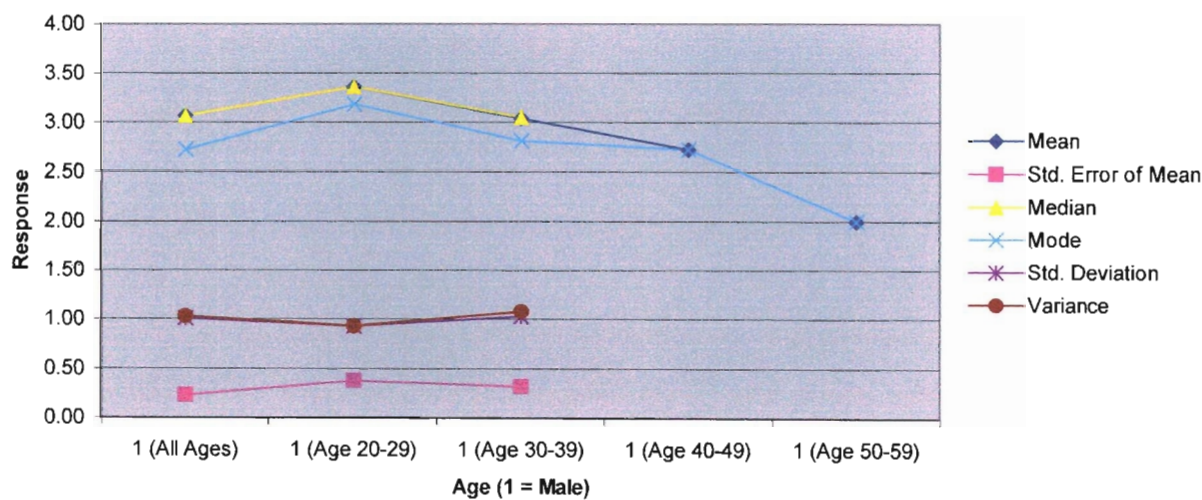
Analysis:

- 1. The overall mode for both sexes was (2-Agree). The results obtained for both sexes did not differ significantly.

2. One can deduce that both sexes, irrespective of circumstances around them, are experiencing subjective career plateaus.
3. The test of how each sex type plans to handle these plateaus could be different in their approach.
4. Further consideration could include dual career couples, flexible work schedules, attitude, and support systems.

### 13.5 Analysis of Job Satisfaction being linked to Male Age Groups

The job satisfaction levels was analysed against the sex factor i.e. female and male to ascertain a relationship between the two variables.

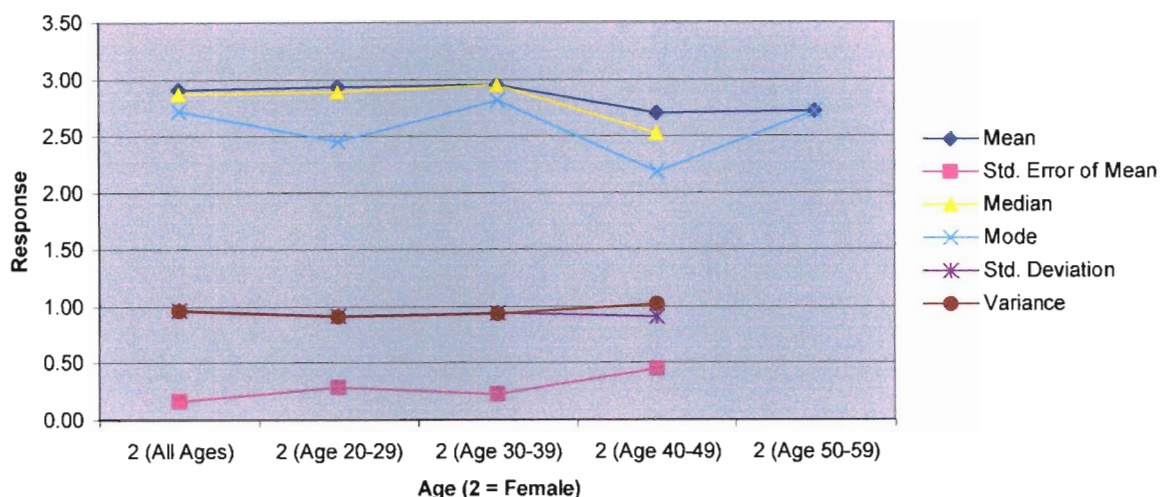


**Figure 9.5 Responses to Various Male Age Groups**

The job satisfaction questionnaires were also analysed against the two sexes i.e. male (1) and female (2).

The average for all questions relating to job satisfaction answered for males =3.07. The above average was further broken down into males between the ages of 20-29 = 3.36, between 30-39 = 3.04, between 40-49 = 2.73 and 50-59 = 2. The overall mode achieved was 2.73, further broken down into ages of 20-29 = 3.18, between 30-39 = 2.82, between 40-49 = 2.73 and 50-59 = 2.

### 13.6 Analysis of Job Satisfaction being linked to Female Age Groups



**Figure 9.6 Responses to Various Female Age Groups**

The job satisfaction questionnaires were further analysed against the two sexes i.e. male (1) and female (2).

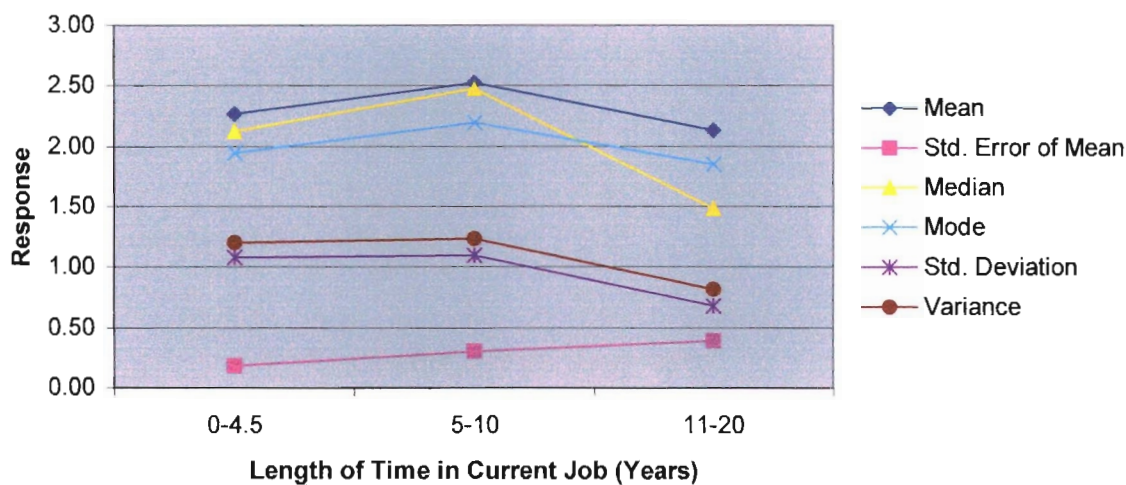
The average for all questions relating to job satisfaction answered for females =2.91. The above average was further broken down into males between the ages of 20-29 = 2.94, between 30-39 = 3.98, between 40-49 = 2.70 and 50-59 = 2.73 The overall mode achieved was 2.73, further broken down into ages of 20-29 = 2.45, between 30-39 = 2.82, between 40-49 = 2.18 and 50-59 = 2.79

#### Analysis

1. Employees scores varied between a (2-Agree) to (3-Unsure) on the Likert scale. As with career plateauing, the perception of plateauing does not indicate a strong relationship between males or female gender types. The important leaning towards a (2-Agree) is significant.
2. Employees job satisfaction levels are low i.e. they are not happy in their present job roles. As explained in the questionnaire, much of the dissatisfaction stems from an unhappiness and a poor reward system, low upward mobility, low responsibility, poor supervision, no ownership of processes in jobs.

3. What can be summarised is that although the sex ratio has not shown a significant relationship between the variables, issues such as power levels, stages in careers, equity, partner support, shared values, availability of child care do play a role in individual's perceptions of job satisfaction.

**13.7 Analysis of Career Plateauing being linked to Length Of Time In Current Job**



**Figure 9.7 Responses to Length of Time in Current Job**

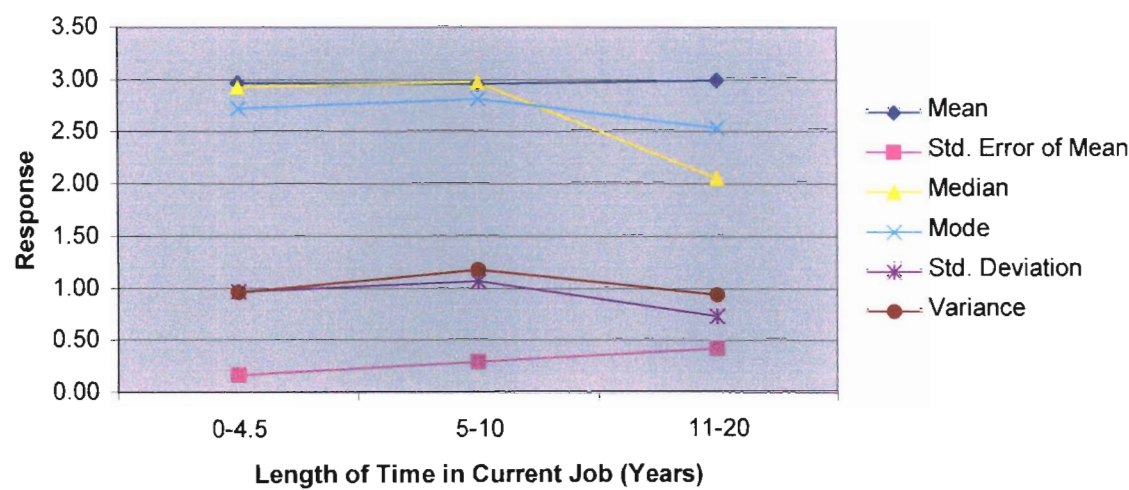
The career plateauing questionnaires were measured against the job tenure of employees. This was broken down into 0-4.5, 5-10 and 11-20 years respectively.

The 0-5 year period included 34 subjects, 5-10 year 13 subjects and 11-20 years 3 subjects.

The average for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 2.27, between 5-10 years = 2.53 and 11-20 years =2.13

The mode or most frequently occurring score for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 1.95, between 5-10 years = 2.20 and 11-20 years =1.85

**13.8 Analysis of Job Satisfaction being linked to Length Of Time In Current Job**



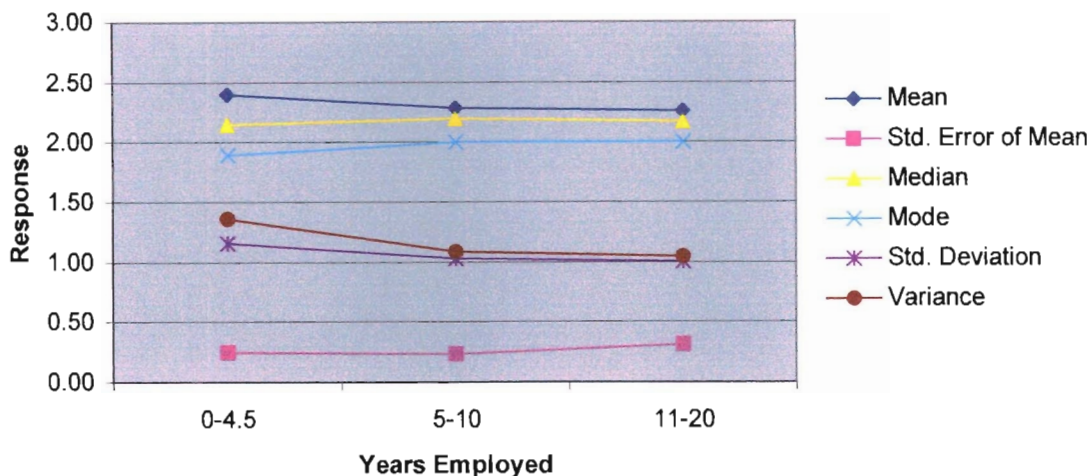
**Figure 9.8 Responses to Length of Time in Current Job**

The job satisfaction questionnaires were measured against the job tenure of employees. This was broken down into 0-4.5, 5-10 and 11-20 years respectively.

34 Staff are in their present jobs for 0-5 years, 13 for 5-10 years and 3 for 11-20 years. The average for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 2.97, between 5-10 years = 2.96 and 11-20 years = 3

The mode or most frequently occurring score for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 2.73, between 5-10 years = 2.82 and 11-20 years = 2.55

### 13.9 Analysis of Career Plateauing being linked to Years Employed



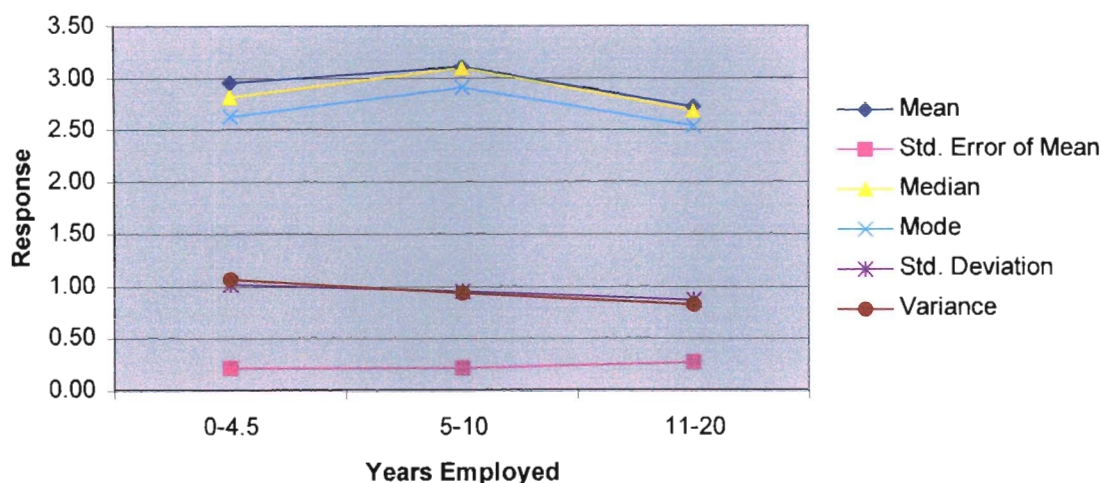
**Figure 9.9 Responses to Year Employed**

The career plateauing questionnaire results were measured against date employed of the subjects. The same constraints were used as job tenure period. However the results measured the period that the subjects were employed for Company A. 21 Staff are employed for 0-5 years, 19 staff are employed for 5-10 years and 10 people are employed for 10-20 years.

The average for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 2.40, between 5-10 years = 2.28 and 11-20 years =2.26

The mode or most frequently occurring score for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 1.90, between 5-10 years = 2. and 11-20 years =2.

### 13.10 Analysis of Job Satisfaction Questionnaire being linked to Years Employed



**Figure 9.10 Responses to Years Employed**

The job satisfaction questionnaire results were measured against date employed of the subjects. The same constraints were used as job tenure period. However the results measured the period that the subjects were employed for Company A. 21 Staff are employed for 0-5 years, 19 staff are employed for 5-10 years and 10 people are employed for 10-20 years.

The average for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 2.96, between 5-10 years = 3.11 and 11-20 years = 2.73

The mode or most frequently occurring score for all questions answered for employees in 0-4.5 years = 2.84, between 5-10 years = 2.91 and 11-20 years = 2.56

#### Analysis

1. The job tenure indicator measures how long an individual was in his present position while the date employed measures how long he was with the company, Company A
2. The perception of plateauing is consistent with the number of years of service offered to the company.
3. As displayed in the research this is further compounded when the likelihood that promotion and growth is low, especially where

employees job tenure is proportional to the time employed in the organisation.

# 14. CORRELATIONAL FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

		Correlations					
		TOTCARP	TOTJSQ	SEX	AGE	LOT CJ	DATEEMP
TOTCARP	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.406(**)	-.064	.180	.172	-.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003	.657	.210	.233	.630
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
TOTJSQ	Pearson Correlation	-.406(**)	1.000	-.144	-.341(*)	-.054	-.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.	.318	.015	.710	.699
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
SEX	Pearson Correlation	-.064	-.144	1.000	.014	-.063	.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.657	.318	.	.925	.665	.934
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
AGE	Pearson Correlation	.180	-.341(*)	.014	1.000	.345(*)	.480(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.210	.015	.925	.	.014	.000
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
LOT CJ	Pearson Correlation	.172	-.054	-.063	.345(*)	1.000	.523(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.233	.710	.665	.014	.	.000
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
DATEEMP	Pearson Correlation	-.070	-.056	.012	.480(**)	.523(**)	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.630	.699	.934	.000	.000	.
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50

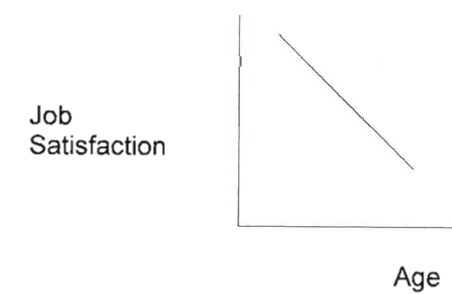
\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## Total Job Satisfaction: Age

### RESULTS:

Pearson Correlation = -0.341



1. The correlation value is negative, indicating that as age increases, job satisfaction decreases.

2. This value is not close to 1 or -1 therefore this indicates that the relationship is of moderate strength i.e. there are certain individuals for example who are young, however are dissatisfied in their job, and vice-versa.

Significance Level = 0.008

1. This value is less than 0.01, therefore the correlation is significant.
2. This value also indicates that there is a linear relationship between the two variables.

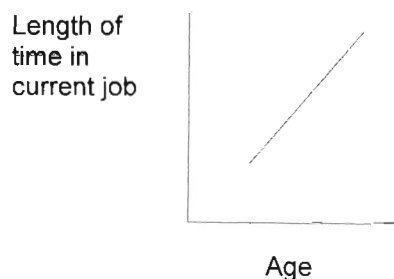
### **COMMENT:**

The above correlation, as established is not a very strong one, hence what can be deduced is that age is linked to job satisfaction, the older one is, the greater the perception of being plateaued. An implication for this study is to establish that those subjects that are over and below the correlation level need to be addressed. Older employees in particular - attention must be given to their motivation levels and hence their job satisfaction levels in the workplace. Concerted efforts must be made to address this group of the population that could very well turn into deadwood being passed over by the organisation.

### **Length of Time in Current job: Age**

#### **RESULTS:**

Pearson Correlation = 0.345



1. The correlation value is positive, indicating a positive relationship i.e. the older people get, the less likely they are to change their jobs.

2. This value is not close to 1 or  $-1$  therefore this indicates that the relationship is of moderate strength.

Significance Level = 0.007

1. This value is less than 0.01, therefore the correlation is significant.
2. This value also indicates that there is a linear relationship between the two variables.

### **COMMENT:**

This is a very obvious correlation. Older employees, due to a lack of marketability are staying in jobs for a longer period of time. This results in poor self-image and being dissatisfied with their jobs. Hence their perceptions of being plateaued are stronger.

The age of 'experience' has been traded in for younger energy i.e. entrants of baby boomers in industry today which is creating a threat for older employees.

### **Date Employed: Age**

#### **RESULTS:**

Pearson Correlation = 0.480



1. The correlation value is positive, indicating a positive relationship i.e. older people are in the organisation for a longer period of time.
2. This value is not close to 1 or  $-1$  therefore this indicates that the relationship is of moderate strength.

1. Significance Level = 0.000
2. This value is less than 0.05, therefore the correlation is significant.
3. This value also indicates that there is a linear relationship.

#### **COMMENT:**

One can conclude that after a certain time in an organisation, aspirations for advancement decline. This is typical of the situation at the company. Employees have stayed on in Company A and are growing older with the company. Personal plateauing has resulted i.e. they cannot move up the hierarchical structure at work due to not having the required skills. This will be addressed later on.

They have gathered experience in the years and are considered the solid citizens and in some instances Company A could have the deadwoods sector of employees as well.

#### **Date Employed: Length Of Time In Current Job**

##### **RESULTS:**

Pearson Correlation = 0.523



1. The correlation value is positive, indicating that value is half of 1 therefore indicating that the relationship is strong i.e. that the length of time in their current positions is in congruence with the period employees are employed for. Employees have retained initial positions with the company.

### COMMENT:

Job tenure measures time in a particular position. The longer one's tenure in that position the more likely it is that one's perception will be consistent with the objective measure of plateauing. Different factors explain objective and subjective plateaus. Previous success, age and education are the only variables shown to be of some importance in determining an objective plateau, measured as time spent in a current position, previous success and individual personality are the best predictors of a subjective plateau.

### Total Career Plateauing: Total Job Satisfaction

#### RESULTS:

Pearson Correlation = -0.406



If the absolute value of the correlation is close to 1, then this indicates a strong relationship between career plateauing and job satisfaction.

Since the value is 0.406 this indicates a moderate to strong relationship. This means that there is a few individuals who are satisfied in their jobs however still perceive that they are career plateaued and vice versa.

Significance Level – 0.003 (P Value)

Since this significance level is very small i.e. less than 0.01 this indicates that job satisfaction and career plateauing are linearly related and the correlation is significant.

Since the P value indicates a significant correlation what this re-emphasizes is that the same results can be confirmed over and again.

Pearson's correlation coefficient is a measure of the linear association between two variables. The linear relationship indicates that the career plateau level will decrease by the same ratio that the job satisfaction value will increase by. These values have a direct proportion to each other.

**COMMENT:**

The more satisfied one is, the lesser the perception of plateauing. This confirms the hypothesis that job satisfaction is linked to career plateauing. The data establishes that this relationship is between moderate to strong suggesting that even though staffers are satisfied in their jobs there is still the perception of being plateaued.

## 15. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Career plateauing has become so widespread in industry today that it should be considered a normal career stage. As the survey results have attested, career plateauing is a common factor with employees of Company A. This section provides solutions to the research objectives (listed in Section 3).

### **15.1 Research Objective # 1: That job satisfaction and motivation influence the perception of plateauing.**

Job satisfaction was measured amongst employees and the results found that employees lingered around being dissatisfied with their jobs or unsure about their satisfaction levels. This is indicative about how employees feel about their jobs and their motivation levels. As already established, both these factors influence the productivity of an individual. In the case of Company A, the satisfaction / motivation index have influenced employee's perceptions of being plateaued. The recognition of this career plateau is a source of stress (stressor) to many individuals. More individuals being plateaued earlier means more individuals falling into the low performance category sooner. This has great implications for Company A, as this is not pleasant in a time when competition from abroad is providing a serious challenge to many domestic companies.

Unproductive workers are a drain not only to the organisation but also upon the economy as a whole. Productivity and individual performance levels may be addressed in a variety of ways, however Company A sits with an even more challenging task on how to keep skilled, experienced employees, whether plateaued or not, productive.

### **15.2 Research Objective # 2: That age, sex, job tenure and number of years employed in a company influence the perception of plateauing.**

#### **AGE**

The extensive analysis completed concludes that the perception of plateauing is consistent with age, the older you are, the greater the perception of

plateauing. However, as discussed above, it is important to relay that more employees falling into the low performance category means that in the case of Company A – with an average majority of 20-30 year olds – it is not uncommon for these individuals to also feel / experience a negative plateau. What we can deduce thereafter is that while a perception of plateauing is congruent with age, there are more and more employees of all ages feeling the same as well. Broader, macro factors which have been highlighted throughout have contributed to the perception of plateauing. This has even more serious implications for the younger staff as this perception is distorted and influences their early experiences of work. The result is that younger employees are feeling like they have no other avenue and that staying in their current jobs with Company A is their fate.

## **SEX**

While it is clear that there is little evidence to show that plateauing is influenced by sex group, men feel like they have reached the end of the road while women get angry and frustrated and believe that this state will turnaround. The research conducted showed no quantifiable proof that either sex was more affected with plateauing but this has further implications in respect to dual couple career households, life stage development etc.

Women have been described as getting frustrated in their jobs while men devastated!

## **YEARS EMPLOYED AND JOB TENURE**

As explained above, the survey concluded that length of time in current job as well as years employed were in tandem with career plateauing. Even employees with the company for a year and more have a perception that they are plateaued. To indicate this, a distinction must be made between effective plateaus (solid citizens) versus non-effective plateaus (deadwoods). Organisations must prevent solid citizens from becoming deadwood and different managerial approaches must be adopted for different career states.

Research has also shown that deadwood employees tend to move companies. This suggests that they may be victims of early career mismatch, choosing to leave because of low job satisfaction or being asked to leave because of poor performance. All of these factors are important in determining the coping mechanism for each career state.

### **15.3 Research Objective # 3: That life cycle theories of Plateauing and succession are important determinants for companies dealing with plateaued employees.**

It is for this reason that the categorisation of performance to potential is a major indicator for organisations like Company A to identify the states of employees for future succession planning. Implications for organisations are to get familiar with the organisational life cycle in order to understand how and why succession occurs and why it does lead to a plateaued employee.

The above demonstrate the importance of devising strategies for managing the different career paths in each plateau state. For the solid citizen, strategies should be focused on maintaining their productivity. For the deadwood, strategies may include termination, demotion or early retirement, or offering educational programmes.

It is important for organisations, to distinguish between solid citizens and deadwood. The similarity in the early career suggests that all persons are originally movers, but have reduced mobility over time. The findings support the notion that solid citizens tend to become organisationally plateaued having the ability to perform, however, there is a lack of openings in the organisation, and, deadwoods become personally plateaued. They either lack the ability required for higher level jobs or don't desire higher level jobs. (Appellbaum, Steven H: 1994)

#### **15.4 Research Objective # 4: That the recognition of a career plateau is a source of stress to many individuals.**

It has been proposed that career satisfaction is linked to an individual's ability to keep the discrepancy between expectations regarding desired outcomes and the reality of the current career at a minimum (Mihal, Sorce & Comte, 1984)

Feldman and Weitz (1988) identify the following sources of career plateaus:

##### **a) Inappropriate skills and abilities**

Many employees at Company A are hampered in their opportunities for promotion or extended responsibilities because they do not have the correct skills and abilities. The frustration presently being felt is due to poor entry-level performance. The study did not gauge formal education however the general entry-level performance is low. Such employees believe that years of experience alone, should guarantee one a place up the hierarchical order.

A portfolio of evidence substantiating one's experience over the years can be generated. The challenges and competitive markets make a formal qualification an essential tool for career growth and for business.

##### **b) Low needs for career mobility**

Company A is seeing an emergence of baby boomers that are entering the company rapidly. These young people enjoy job tenure and promotions because of their dispositions. This was not the case in previous years, as established above, entry levels were low, people were guaranteed a 'job for life' and this has made them complacent in their positions.

With limited aspirations, low need for upward movement, and being satisfied with their 'lot' they have not adequately addressed their career paths and explored other opportunities within the company.

### **c) Lack of intrinsic motivation**

Relating to Herzberg's two-factor theory, intrinsic motivation i.e. the motivators are an essential feature to attain satisfaction. Achievement, responsibility, recognition, growth and advancement are attributes that are not regularly found in the work environment. The culture of Company A should incorporate a reward culture encompassing all of the above factors.

### **d) Stress and Burnout**

Company A has come from an era where there were limited performance management initiatives, to a culture that is alive, present and results driven. Further economies of scale have dictated a 'shape up or ship out' ethos that puts added pressure to all employees in the organisation. In order to perform to expected benchmarks, stressing out and burning out are common features in the Call Centre environment. Employees have not achieved a balance between their personal and work life hence the high stress levels and the perceptions of plateauing.

### **e) Lack of extrinsic rewards**

Herzberg makes mention of extrinsic factors such as pay, working conditions, supervision, company policies and fringe benefits. Presently, staffs at Company A feel disadvantaged when dealing with the issue of salary. They are constantly compared to their Inland colleagues but are not remunerated the same. Salary discrepancies for the same deliverables as their colleagues in Gauteng have become a contentious issue among them.

Benefits given to staff are not adequate for their worth. Of recent (January 2003) Company A has negotiated a cost to company structure based on performance related pay. Company policies are questioned in terms of consistency and fairness. Management need to focus on the extrinsic rewards that they could offer to employees that will result in them being motivated, and hence productive.

A factor to consider would be for how long will external factors sustain motivation levels, before employees start to feel de-motivated again?

#### **f) Slow company growth**

Bradwick (1986) distinguished between two kinds of plateauing, i.e. structural plateauing and content plateauing.

The organisational hierarchy is the cause of structural plateauing i.e. due to the limited posts available within the organisation structure – people are unable to move up the corporate ladder. This is typical of the situation being experienced in Company A presently where there are a great number of people who are vying for one post.

This situation is further escalated, because individuals believe that they have reached the end of the road and that there are no further chances for promotion if they are not moving up the corporate ladder. This results in the perception of career plateauing.

Bradwick went further to advise that content plateauing occurs when an individual is too used to the job and regards it as routine and not challenging enough. Within Company A this is a common phenomena where individuals have become “experts” at their jobs – having been in their current jobs for long periods of time. Employees are bored with their jobs and looking at moving up the corporate ladder is an avenue to avoid this feeling. Content plateauing can be more easily avoided than structural plateauing.

If an individual perceives a gap between expectation and reality, dissatisfaction will occur. Additionally, the greater the discrepancy, the greater will be the likelihood of that individual will experience strong stress reactions (Janiss & mann, 1977)

## **Career Plateauing and Mobility**

Another important research study conducted sought to determine sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, differentiated plateaus and non-plateaus. The definition of a plateau was the point at which the career mobility, including both upward and lateral moves, is in reasonable doubt because of the length of time in the present position.

This study focused on the timing of mobility events of plateaued managers contrasted with non-plateaued managers. The subjects were classified into the deadwood category (ineffective plateau) or the solid citizen category (effective plateau) based on the average percentage increase in salary received during the last 12 months for all respondents. The study examined the career attitudes central to plateaued career including: fear of stagnation (extent to which individuals are unwilling to accept career plateau), career impatience (extent to which individuals are unwilling to be patient with their career progress), marketability (extent to which subjects viewed their chances of obtaining a position in another company) and propensity to leave (extent to which subjects were willing to leave for a better job in another company). Satisfaction with Herzberg's motivation – hygiene factors was also measured. To measure the relative potential for future mobility in a position, the actual mobility of the prior occupant of the position was also utilized [16, p.p. 569-570].

**15.5 Research Objective # 5 and # 6: That coping responses are developed by individuals as a result of the career plateauing stress and that personal and organisational variables unique to each individual will moderate the selection of specific coping responses to the plateau.**

The response of an individual denied a promotion may initially be disappointment or anxiety at first level feeling of stress. That experience of stress will not necessarily be prolonged, and in many cases may dissipate, either with time or with an eventual promotion. However, if the individual continues to be passed over for promotions, the feelings of first level stress may return and intensify. With each event that the individual perceives to be a

constraint on organisational advancement, the feelings of stress may continue to intensify until eventually second level outcomes occur.

	Transition	Reappraisal	Defence
Positive responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Learning new job skills</li><li>➤ Lateral transfer</li><li>➤ Participation in task force</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Acting as mentor to younger employees</li><li>➤ Find reward in task success rather than personal advancement</li></ul>	
Negative responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Leave the organisation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Blame the plateau on the organisation, feelings of alienation, or powerlessness or hostility</li><li>➤ Psychological withdrawal from the job</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Absenteeism</li><li>➤ Alcohol, drugs</li><li>➤ Poor work performance</li></ul>

**Fig 10: Examples of positive and negative coping responses to career plateau stress from perspective of the organisation**

The distinction between transition, reappraisal and defence is important as these responses relate to specific points on the stress cycle that will respond to organisational intervention. For example, if a good employee is likely to choose a transitory coping mechanism (lateral move or learning a new skill)

this could mean the difference between the employee remaining with the organisation or moving to a new firm.

## **16. RECOMMENDATIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL ACTIONS**

It should be borne in mind that there is no single answer to the problem of plateauing, however Company A can take the following steps to address the problem of plateauing; -

### **1. Change the climate through education**

Presently Company A does not have a formal career management system. As such employees are not communicated their succession paths and are not given constant feedback on their progress and career pathing initiatives. Education in respect to career programs must be conducted and honest feedback must be given to all.

### **2. Create an equitable personnel policy**

Of recent, December 2002, Company A has embarked on a CTC program, Cost to Company pay structure which is aimed at rating pay in respect to performance. This has ensured an equitable rate of pay across all levels for all employees factoring in benefits such as, medical aid subsidies and pension fund contributions. The performance appraisals done bi-annually will be linked to performance. This encourages employees to be motivated to perform better, and indicates the performance expectations of Company A.

### **3. Change the structure of the organization**

Growth in an organisation should not be seen only in terms of climbing up the corporate ladder. As explained before, only 1% of employees are able to climb up the hierarchical structure due to limited spaces being available. Organisations have become flatter in structure and the implication for Company A as an organisation, is to introduce concepts such as project work, flexible jobs and virtual offices to accommodate for an effective career management policy for all.

#### **4. Encourage plateaued workers to identify their own challenges**

The protean concept of career management prompts an individual to take charge of their lives, hence their careers. Previously organisations have borne the responsibility of mapping individual career paths and hence determine career success.

Of recent, the focus is shifted from the organisations responsibility to that of the individual but the most preferred option is of a joint responsibility with the ownership resting on the individual i.e. determine his own career path, understanding his limitations, strengths and own challenges.

#### **5. Pay for performance**

Company A's latest initiative i.e. performance related pay encourages individuals to focus on key performance areas. It reinforces a performance culture and is able to attract and retain high performance personnel.

The objective of PRP (performance related pay) is to emphasise the importance of teamwork as well as individual performance.

#### **6. Set up job rotation programmes to create lateral movement and broaden skills**

Career movement should not only be viewed in light of promotions but internal moves such as sideways movement i.e. transfers, relocations, must be considered. Job rotation must be introduced as the survey results indicated above is that individuals have done their jobs for so long that they now view it as repetitive and boring. Job rotation could be used to broaden employee skills, and allow them to become more multi-skilled in their job orientation.

#### **7. Set up communication channels to ask plateaued employees what would motivate them**

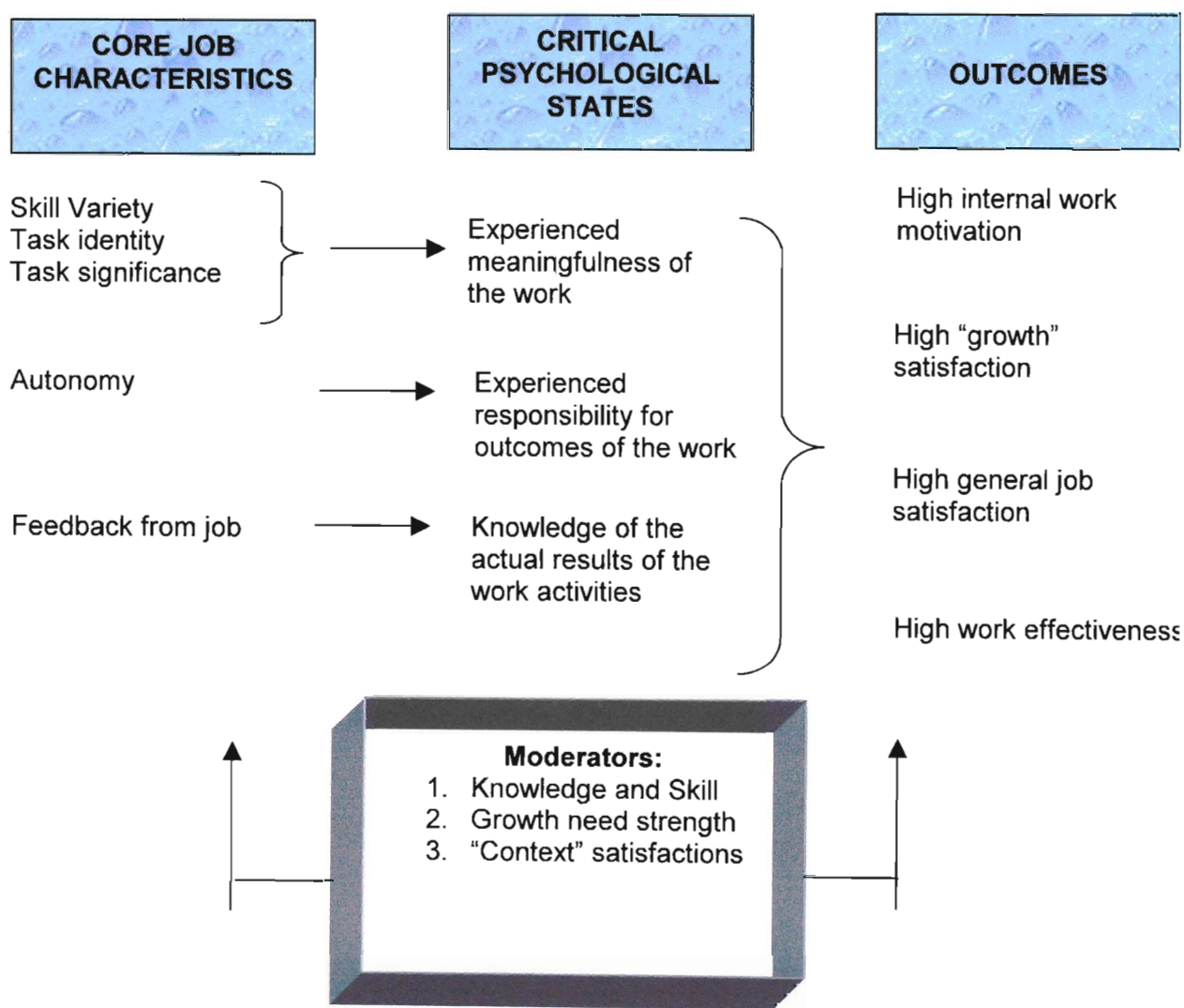
The research conducted thus far show that job satisfaction and a perception of career plateauing existed among employees of Company A. Individuals are their own critics; hence focus groups and workshops can be implemented. The purpose of which would be to indicate high motivators as explored by Herzberg. The communication forum must be

created for them to voice their concerns, suggestions and recommendations.

8. Job enrichment

Herzberg identified hygiene factors that help to prevent dissatisfaction. Herzberg advised that job enrichment was an important concept for the content of jobs as a significant force. Job enrichment, at Company A could increase job depth, the degree to which an individual can plan and control the work involved in their jobs.

Fig 11: Job Characteristics Model (Reprinted from J Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham)



According to the model above, these critical states then lead to major outcomes shown, which would allow for work effectiveness stemming from high work quality and greater quantities.

#### **9. Provide exposure for all personnel, not just for the stars**

Research conducted (as stated above) is that organisations tend to put /place emphasis on their stars i.e.: those individuals who perform well constantly. As the findings state emphasis must be moved across the four quadrants of employees to the solid citizens, learners as well as the deadwood. The stars are being provided with positive feedback, are given more opportunities, challenges and the same should be done for other personnel. Each should be give similar opportunities and exposure.

#### **10.Reduce the importance of promotion and increase the value of challenge**

Company A could advise employees of the negative features of promotion i.e. long hours, greater responsibility etc in order for them to make informed decisions about their career progress. The linear career pattern should be complimented with other types of career pattern styles i.e. spiral and transitory career styles. The linear career pattern is not available for all staff and as such rewards such as promotions, high salaries, quick recognition and incentives should not be viewed as the ultimate in reward management.

#### **11. Encourage new ways of doing tasks**

Company A could encourage 'project type' jobs. The business of healthcare is such that new managed care initiatives are being drawn into the market, these could be managed as projects and people could be grouped in respect to subject matter expertise for the duration of the project. Employees should be involved in decisions and activities that affect them. Testing of new systems should be given to employees directly working with them. This provides for involvement and keeps employees motivated.

## **12. Provide career information systems**

Company A needs to embark on an effective career management program. This program should highlight goals and plans for the individuals. The program should entail an individual assessment (information about self), environmental assessment (information about work), comparison of self-perceptions with those of others (reality testing), choosing among alternatives, establishing and implementing a plan (action planning).

## **13. Dealing with the plateaued Manager**

As John Davies and Yvonne Deighan have suggested: "Preoccupied with motivating and retaining our superstars, we have neglected the needs of the vast majority of managers who actually keep the business going. The problem is that, once they know they can rise no higher in the organization, they are likely to experience what Professor John Hunt called the 'managerial menopause'".

These people can fall into 3 categories as defined by Davies and Deighan:<sup>1</sup>

1. Contented Maturity – people who have progressed well and feel that they have had a satisfying career in a good company. Although they have been overtaken by high flyers, they are not too put out by this and are content to go on doing their job well and find satisfaction outside as well as inside work. In these cases, the policy might be to recognise the worth of these 'solid citizens', keep them rewarded appropriately, and strive to enlarge or enrich their jobs when this is possible. They make excellent mentors.

Many people are not as ambitious as some achievers think they are or ought to be. For those who are in a state of contented maturity, the organization should have a policy of registering how much it values their services and accepting that 'they have done jolly well and need not be driven any further'.

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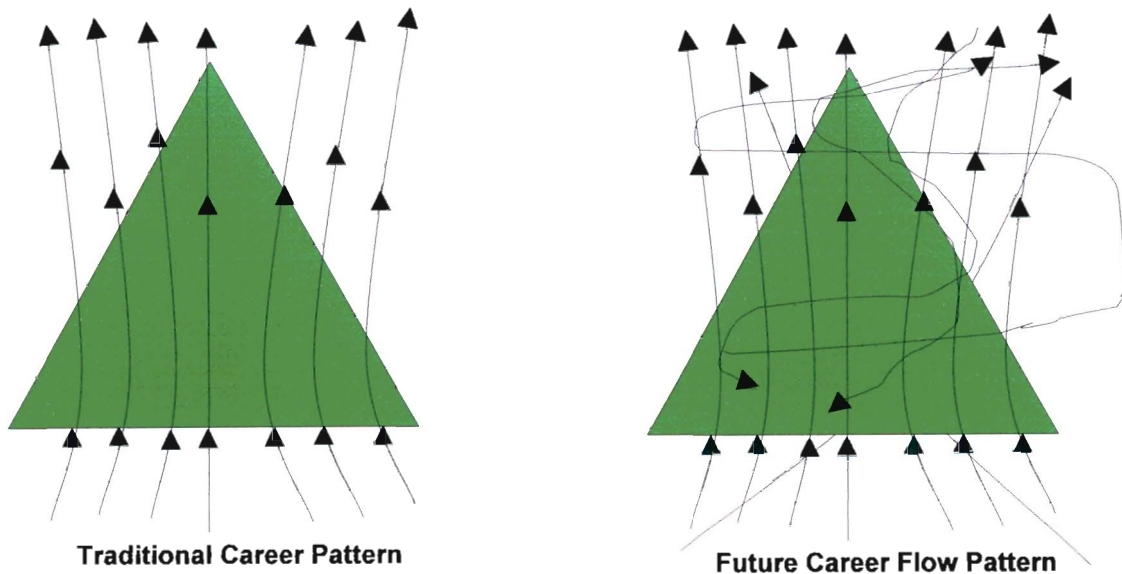
<sup>1</sup> Personnel Management, March 1986

2. Discontented Maturity – many people who have plateaued but in spite of having progressed reasonably well, believe that they should go further and are under pressure to do so because of their own ambitions (possibly unrealistic), the cult of success in the company or even the expectations of their spouse. Because of their frustrated expectations these people tend to be characterized by low morale, cynicism, staleness and depression. Revitalizing them is again a matter for job enrichment and enlargement as part of a programme for changing job structures, where possible.

This approach should become a deliberate policy of the company, but it needs to be backed up by counselling which will help those affected adversely by plateauing to learn to live with it and, perhaps, positively enjoy the feeling that they no longer have to join in the 'rat race'. The policy on counselling should therefore incorporate help to plateaued managers as well as rising stars. Career management may primarily be concerned with development but it also has to take care of those people who are worth taking care of at each stage of their career.

3. Thwarted rising stars – people who have started out well but are now burning themselves out and not living up to their own expectations to become reconciled to their situation, but it will not necessarily work in this way. It may be necessary to have a policy which recognizes that thwarted rising stars need 'out-placement' rather than job counselling, that is, help in restructuring their careers elsewhere.

## 17. CONCLUSION



**Fig 12: Career Patterns**

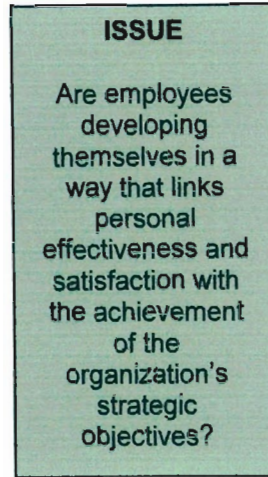
Career patterns for individuals are changing. The top figure shows a traditional career pattern, where one enters an organization near the bottom, works there for many years, and gradually and predictably moves up retiring from a fairly high level position. This is hardly the situation today with the bulge of baby boomers who have made climbing the hierarchy much more competitive. The flattening of organizational structures has reduced the number of management positions just as the number of candidates has increased.

This has caused a great deal of frustration as today's middle aged employees see themselves failing to advance as rapidly as they had expected. Some of these individuals are leaving big companies to start their own businesses or free-lance as consultants. Others have adopted a career pattern that involves moving between employers more frequently than their predecessors might have.

## ORGANISATIONAL NEEDS

What are the organization's major strategic issues over the next two or three years?

- What are the most critical needs and challenges that the organization will face over the next two or three years?
- What critical skills, knowledge and experience will be needed to meet these challenges?
- What staffing levels will be required?
- Does the organization have the strength necessary to meet the critical challenges?



## INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

How do I find career opportunities within the organization that will do the following?

- Use my strengths
- Address my developmental needs
- Provide challenges
- Match my interests
- Match my values
- Match my personal style

**Fig 13: Career Development System: linking organizational needs with individual needs**

As figure 13 demonstrates, career management for today and the future require a vision that is developed into a strategy and placed in relation to the company's overall goals. Organisation fit and job fit must successfully match the two. Individuals should attend courses that include internal / external factors e.g. an overview of the marketplace environment, organisational characteristics, individual perceptions of the career state and individual attitudes in order for them to make balanced decisions about their career plans.

It is important for organisations like Company A to identify the career stage / life stage of their employees and provide counselling in respect to the various stages. As the research has advised, it is normal for those who feel less apt than others in dealing with such career states to have a greater impression of having reached a plateau.

The 'one size fits all' adage is not the answer to plateauing. Individuals have different dynamics and needs. The concept has not fully been investigated

and such employees may be feeling like they have the “career doldrums” without actually understanding it. The mystery and stigma associated to this career state must be explained and spoken about more freely. Career counselling initiatives will assist the process and taking control and owning the process by individuals is paramount for its success.

Common assumptions about plateaued employees are that they have lower job performance, lower motivation, lower satisfaction, lower aspiration, lower job performance, and bad attitude. Some studies conducted have proven otherwise. That plateaued employees are neither less motivated nor less satisfied than non- plateaued employees. In addition, they do not have poorer attitudes and work behaviours. They did however rate their jobs as less challenging and less rewarding, and reported much lower career aspirations. With this said, the learning curve requires plateaus. Although they provide an element of frustration to the individual it is a highly valuable and stable period of rest and security that provides an opportunity to regain perspective and digest new ideas.

It is in the day-to-day management that we believe the organisation can make a significant contribution toward lessening the career plateau problem; a company can work to effectively defuse the career plateau stress cycle. Adding, very importantly, the protean concept of managing one’s own career is a major feature for one’s career success.

The meaning of work embraces the significance that work or working has in people’s lives. Different meanings can be derived from different concepts associated with work. Therefore, career survival in the twenty first century requires inter alia, commitment to skills development and perpetual learning, which might be the only guarantee for employment.

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APPENDIX A

CAREER PLATEAUIING QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

The following items relate to your perceptions of opportunities in the organisation for further advancement / promotion / development. There are no right or wrong answers, so please indicate what you really feel by putting a ✓ in the column that most appropriately deals with your feelings.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Unsure (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
1. I have been passed over for promotion in my company.					
2. I have stagnated in my current job.					
3. There is not much scope for advancement for me in this organisation.					
4. I am frustrated by my lack of promotion here					
5. There are not many opportunities for personal advancement in this company					
6. I have been doing my current job for too long					
7. People who get promoted do not deserve their promotion					
8. I am not worried about further promotion in this company					
9. I am happy to do the job that I am doing now for the rest of my working days					

10. I don't think it is likely I will be promoted in the company in the foreseeable future					
11. Lack of personal advancement in this company is something I find difficult to tolerate					
12. The company doesnot have a suitable development programme for its employees.					
13. Promotions are based on who you know in this organisation					
14. The company looks at external applicants for a job instead of developing internal resources.					
15. The company is not concerned for the advancement of the quality of Human Resources i.e. those with good qualifications and experience					
16.The company does not have a clear policy aimed at rewarding performance.					

17. The company doesnot have a sense of loyalty towards its employees.					
18. The company should invest more in its quality of Human Resources					
19. The company does not have a clear hierarchical structure for mobility within the organisation					
20. The culture of the organisation does not facilitate the upward advancement of its individuals					

COMMENTS

APPENDIX B

JOB SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

The following items relate to your perceptions of opportunities in the organisation for further advancement / promotion / development. There are no right or wrong answers, so please indicate what you really feel by putting a ✓ in the column that most appropriately deals with your feelings.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Unsure (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
1. On most days I do not feel satisfied with my job.					
2. I dislike my job.					
3. I am not enthusiastic about my job.					
4. I would quit this job at once if I could.					
5. I would like to change my job for another one.					
6. I have no growth in my job.					
7. I dislike my job more than other people dislike theirs					
8. Basically, I don't like my job					
9. All in all, I feel dissatisfied with my job					
10. I do not find real enjoyment in my job.					
11. I would consider taking another job.					

**FOR STATISTICAL PURPOSES:**

POSITION IN COMPANY	_____
DATE EMPLOYED	_____
AGE IN YEARS	_____
GENDER	_____
LENGTH OF TIME IN CURRENT JOB (in years)	_____

## REALIBILITY ANALYSIS

```
***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****
```

		Mean	Std Dev	Cases
1.	CARP1	2.9400	1.3763	50.0
2.	CARP2	2.6000	1.1606	50.0
3.	CARP3	2.2400	1.1877	50.0
4.	CARP4	2.4800	1.3130	50.0
5.	CARP5	2.2400	1.1350	50.0
6.	CARP6	2.7600	1.2382	50.0
7.	CARP7	2.4200	.9495	50.0
8.	CARP8	2.3200	1.1683	50.0
9.	CARP9	1.9200	1.0270	50.0
10.	CARP10	2.4400	1.1095	50.0
11.	CARP11	2.4200	1.1796	50.0
12.	CARP12	2.6000	1.1429	50.0
13.	CARP13	2.2400	1.0606	50.0
14.	CARP14	2.2600	1.1572	50.0
15.	CARP15	2.1600	.9765	50.0
16.	CARP16	1.9600	.9889	50.0
17.	CARP17	2.1800	.9833	50.0
18.	CARP18	1.9200	.7783	50.0
19.	CARP19	2.3000	.8864	50.0
20.	CARP20	2.1400	.9260	50.0

Statistics for	Mean	Variance	Std Dev	N of Variables
SCALE	46.5400	193.6004	13.9140	20

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - SCALE (ALPHA)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
CARP1	43.6000	180.5714	.3010	.9260
CARP2	43.9400	176.3024	.5176	.9196
CARP3	44.3000	173.1122	.6104	.9175
CARP4	44.0600	165.4453	.7825	.9131
CARP5	44.3000	170.6224	.7315	.9147
CARP6	43.7800	174.9506	.5226	.9197
CARP7	44.1200	175.3322	.6906	.9161
CARP8	44.2200	186.6649	.1745	.9272
CARP9	44.6200	184.0771	.3039	.9236
CARP10	44.1000	175.1939	.5848	.9180
CARP11	44.1200	173.1690	.6133	.9174
CARP12	43.9400	173.7310	.6162	.9173
CARP13	44.3000	174.5000	.6415	.9168
CARP14	44.2800	173.1037	.6291	.9170
CARP15	44.3800	172.8527	.7709	.9145
CARP16	44.5800	175.6771	.6464	.9169
CARP17	44.3600	176.4800	.6183	.9174
CARP18	44.6200	178.5261	.6957	.9169
CARP19	44.2400	176.0637	.7121	.9160
CARP20	44.4000	172.4898	.8326	.9136

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 50.0

N of Items = 20

Alpha = .9218

\*\*\*\*\* Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis \*\*\*\*\*

—

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - SCALE (ALPHA  
A)

		Mean	Std Dev	Cases
1.	JSQ1	2.2800	.9906	50.0
2.	JSQ2	3.9400	.9127	50.0
3.	JSQ3	2.4400	.9930	50.0
4.	JSQ4	2.7600	1.1528	50.0
5.	JSQ5	3.5200	1.1648	50.0
6.	JSQ6	3.6600	1.0022	50.0
7.	JSQ7	2.5000	.9530	50.0
8.	JSQ8	2.2400	.8935	50.0
9.	JSQ9	2.7800	1.0160	50.0
10.	JSQ10	2.7000	1.0152	50.0
11.	JSQ11	3.8400	.7918	50.0
12.	CARP1	2.9400	1.3763	50.0
13.	CARP2	2.6000	1.1606	50.0
14.	CARP3	2.2400	1.1877	50.0
15.	CARP4	2.4800	1.3130	50.0
16.	CARP5	2.2400	1.1350	50.0
17.	CARP6	2.7600	1.2382	50.0
18.	CARP7	2.4200	.9495	50.0
19.	CARP8	2.3200	1.1683	50.0
20.	CARP9	1.9200	1.0270	50.0
21.	CARP10	2.4400	1.1095	50.0
22.	CARP11	2.4200	1.1796	50.0
23.	CARP12	2.6000	1.1429	50.0
24.	CARP13	2.2400	1.0606	50.0
25.	CARP14	2.2600	1.1572	50.0
26.	CARP15	2.1600	.9765	50.0
27.	CARP16	1.9600	.9889	50.0
28.	CARP17	2.1800	.9833	50.0
29.	CARP18	1.9200	.7783	50.0
30.	CARP19	2.3000	.8864	50.0
31.	CARP20	2.1400	.9260	50.0

Statistics for	Mean	Variance	Std Dev	N of Variables
SCALE	79.2000	161.7551	12.7183	31

—

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - SCALE (ALPHA  
A)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
JSQ1	76.9200	159.5853	.0475	.8143
JSQ2	75.2600	162.7678	-.0793	.8177
JSQ3	76.7600	159.0024	.0705	.8135
JSQ4	76.4400	163.6392	-.1089	.8220
JSQ5	75.6800	166.8751	-.2152	.8263
JSQ6	75.5400	162.7433	-.0779	.8187
JSQ7	76.7000	159.5204	.0551	.8138
JSQ8	76.9600	162.8147	-.0815	.8175
JSQ9	76.4200	159.6771	.0407	.8148
JSQ10	76.5000	162.5408	-.0702	.8186
JSQ11	75.3600	168.3984	-.3538	.8237
CARP1	76.2600	149.8698	.2965	.8063
CARP2	76.6000	148.3265	.4274	.8002
CARP3	76.9600	144.6922	.5478	.7947
CARP4	76.7200	137.8792	.7184	.7852
CARP5	76.9600	144.4065	.5888	.7934
CARP6	76.4400	148.3331	.3942	.8015
CARP7	76.7800	146.2567	.6356	.7937
CARP8	76.8800	157.5363	.0973	.8140
CARP9	77.2800	155.8384	.1896	.8095
CARP10	76.7600	146.6351	.5169	.7966
CARP11	76.7800	146.5424	.4840	.7976
CARP12	76.6000	143.2653	.6281	.7916
CARP13	76.9600	145.7127	.5826	.7944
CARP14	76.9400	143.8535	.5966	.7928
CARP15	77.0400	143.5902	.7355	.7896
CARP16	77.2400	146.5943	.5923	.7948
CARP17	77.0200	148.1833	.5265	.7973
CARP18	77.2800	148.6139	.6606	.7954
CARP19	76.9000	147.3980	.6305	.7947
CARP20	77.0600	144.7514	.7246	.7909

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 50.0

N of Items = 31

Alpha = .8101