

Research Article

Organisation Advocacy While Experiencing a Career Plateau: The Mediating Moderating Role of Emotional Exhaustion and Organisation Embeddedness

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Abstract

Board members often focus on improving the company's net promoter score. An excellent net promoter score reflects customers' and employees' engagement with the company and their readiness to engage in organisational advocacy. Companies often measure organisation advocacy to measure the extent of employee engagement. This research evaluates factors that could influence organisation advocacy. It studies the negative impact of career plateau and emotional exhaustion on organisation advocacy. It further evaluates the positive moderating impact of organisation embeddedness on organisation advocacy. The social identity theory lens evaluates the model and posits that organisation advocacy could be compromised if the employee's identity gets threatened. The research findings support a significant negative impact of emotional exhaustion on organisation advocacy. Further results prove a significant positive impact of career plateau on emotional exhaustion and a negative impact on Organisation advocacy, mediated through emotional exhaustion. Organisation embeddedness is further seen to positively moderate the combined mediated negative impact of career plateau and emotional exhaustion on organisation advocacy. Employees who are embedded in the organisation try to maintain their social identity and avoid speaking negatively about their organisation. For management, this paper brings forth the point that the supervisor occupying their position for a long time may often be the reason for the subordinate not getting a promotion and experiencing a career plateau. Strategies to maintain subordinate social identity, reduce career plateau, reduce emotional exhaustion and improve organisation embeddedness are further deliberated.

Keywords

Organisation Advocacy, Career Plateau, Emotional Exhaustion, Organisation Embeddedness, Social Identity Theory

1. Introduction

Due to the dwindling post-COVID office space, working anywhere and anytime quickly replaces the synchronised world of working. Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML) and the Internet of Things (IoT) have swept away previous jobs while creating many new methods of

work. This new paradigm has put unprecedented demands on adapting to these new working methods. Competition for good jobs has become more intense. More people reach career plateaus (CP) earlier than expected [11]. Within all these shifts, the pyramidal nature of the hierarchical organisation

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structure and career progression will continue to give individuals social recognition. However, only a few employees who evolve in new ways will get social recognition and have faster career progression. In contrast, others must wait for the opportunity and progress slowly or even CP [27].

Social recognition is explained through the social identity theory (SIT). SIT is “the portion of an individual’s self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group” such that the members work towards protecting and reinforcing individuals’ self-identity [26]. Due to this protection of self-identity, any threat to the identity, even if in the form of CP, would intuitively evoke stress for an individual. McGrath defined stress as an “imbalance between environmental demands and the response capability” of an individual [20]. The individual appraises these situations as exceeding their existing resources and endangering their well-being [15]. For an individual, dissatisfaction is also due to the gap in one’s expectations on career progression and not being fulfilled due to a CP, which could also lead to stress and negative emotions [5]. When the stress due to a CP gets prolonged, the individual feels a lack of sufficient emotional resources to overcome the stressors confronting them and could experience emotional exhaustion (EE) [16]. The EE could result in adverse outcomes like anxiety, burnout, and isolation [18].

An employee who has reached a CP and is emotionally exhausted due to prolonged stress may not be engaged with the organisation. EE prompts individuals to disengage themselves emotionally from work to reduce stress. Disengagement from the organisation further leads to distrust and pessimism towards the organisation [19]. Disengagement and distrust could thus further lead to reduced organisation advocacy (OA). OA is the extent to which an employee is loyal to the organisation and is ready to give positive word-of-mouth publicity about the organisation [24]. OA is leaders’ most crucial matrix to measure employee engagement levels [24]. Hence, a CP employee could be EE and do less OA.

However, what if the employee has been in the organisation for some time and gets organisation embedded (OE)? Employees tenured in the organisation may become embedded and develop social links with other employees, teams, and social groups. They may also fit in better at the job. They must sacrifice many tangible and intangible benefits due to separation from the organisation [22]. For the same reasons, even a dis-satisfied embedded employee will not leave due to solid links, compatibility and sacrifices one needs to make while leaving the current organisation [22]. This embeddedness is possible as employees may work in reputed organisations with good leadership teams and benefits. In such a case, the CP employee in their current role would prefer to rotate to different jobs within the organisation to integrate with the larger organisation’s social system [25] rather than leave it [23]. Thus, an OE employee who is career plateauing may wait for a promotion or transfer within the company [17]

and continue to do a higher OA. This paper explores how an employee who is CP could experience EE. However, if the employee is also OE, the negative impacts of EE on OA could be lessened.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Career Plateau

Career Plateau (CP) was first defined as an individual’s low promotion opportunity [9]. CP was earlier seen due to objective parameters like age (above 40 years), tenure in current role (above seven years), and hierarchical position. Later, research took these as covariants [14]. CP is now redefined as the cognitive belief of the individual that their likelihood of future promotion is limited [6]. Using SIT, while satisfaction with career progression has a positive impact, the adverse outcomes of perceived CP were observed. These were perceptions of a lack of support from the organisation and supervisors or even burnout [31].

CP could be in the form of job content plateau (JCP), inclusion plateau (IP) or hierarchical plateau (HP). Herein, JCP is defined as lacking job challenges due to repetitive responsibilities [28]. IP is the lack of authority and power in decision-making in an individual’s work [8]. The HP is defined as the lack of promotion opportunities in the future [2]. Among JCP, IP and HP, the JCP and HP were the most researched [31]. We focused on the IP for this study because the BFSI space has a challenging and uncertain environment. The IP could create more stress due to the gap between expectation and outcome than the JCP or HP, as jobs are specialised, restricting job rotation (increasing JCP) and the hierarchy is flatter in the BFSI sector (increasing HP).

2.2. Emotional Exhaustion

Poor mental health and burnout are usually psychological symptoms of emotional exhaustion (EE), leading to depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment [18]. As a psychological strain symptom often triggered by a threat to one’s social identity, EE ‘refers to feeling overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources [19]. EE is a unique quality of work-life “indicator with the potential to estimate the cumulative effect of work stress and well-being” [10]. People scoring higher on EE were reported for poor mental health, upset and angry, tense, anxious, physically exhausted, complaining about problems at work, wanted to get away from people [18]. From a career progression viewpoint, empirical research has established a relationship between HP and poor well-being, higher stress levels and EE [1, 4, 29]. We focus on IP and hypothesise that IP impacts individuals’ EE.

Hypothesis 1: Inclusion plateau positively impacts emo-

tional exhaustion.

2.3. Organisation Advocacy

Customer organisation advocacy (OA) is widely used to measure customer loyalty and rate the likelihood of recommending a company, product, or service to friends or colleagues. OA is commonly used in the service industry. It was introduced in a hospital as an overarching measure of patient satisfaction. OA measured the likelihood of a patient recommending the hospital service to another person [12]. In another study, customer loyalty results (OA) were compared with the American Index of Customer Satisfaction (ACSI) and the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI). The study also demonstrated a positive association between customer satisfaction and loyalty (OA) [7].

Organisation advocacy by the employees (OA) similarly helps to measure employee loyalty. Employees demonstrate OA through positive word-of-mouth and willingness to recommend their company to friends, family, and colleagues as the best workplace. Improving employee OA leads to business efficiency and effectiveness. In comparison, employee loyalty could be measured using instruments like Loyalty Boosterism or organisation citizenship behaviour. The simplicity of the OA method in measuring employee loyalty has gained significant momentum. It is widely used by Fortune 500 companies [24]. OA gets impacted if employees' social identity is compromised. They experience stress and anxiety and are disengaged. It is postulated that EE could lead to poorer OA.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional exhaustion negatively impacts organisation advocacy.

CP could lead to EE, leading to lower OA. It is hypothesised that EE could thus be mediating between IP and OA.

Hypothesis 3: Emotional exhaustion mediates between the

inclusion plateau and organisation advocacy such that when emotional exhaustion is high, the negative impact of the inclusion plateau on organisation advocacy is higher.

2.4. Organisation Embeddedness

Organisation Embeddedness (OE) was defined as the extent to which the employee has an excellent social identity, is enmeshed and connected, like in a web, and is attached to the job, which holds them back from leaving. OE has three sub-factors, namely 'link', the formal and informal social network one develops within the organisation. The second is 'fit', one's compatibility with the job and non-job-related environment the organisation offers. The third is 'sacrifice', which is the loss of material or psychological benefits that are forfeited upon leaving the organisation [22].

The BFSI industry is built on the element of 'Trust'. Hence, we are interested in the 'sacrifice' factor of embeddedness (OEs). In changing organisations within the finance industry, the cost could be a loss of trust in customer and co-worker relationships, an unstable income or an untrustworthy new employer. The more severe the cost of separation, the more the employee will be bound by the organisation [3]. Employees who are more embedded rather suppress any organisation deviant behaviour or negative OA. It is hypothesised that the sacrifice factor of organisation embeddedness (OEs) would be moderating between EE and OA, such that when OEs are high, the negative impact of EE on OA is lesser than when OEs are lower.

Hypothesis 4: Organisation embeddedness moderates the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion between inclusion plateau and organisation advocacy such that when organisation embeddedness is high (low), emotional exhaustion's negative impact is lesser (higher) on organisation advocacy.

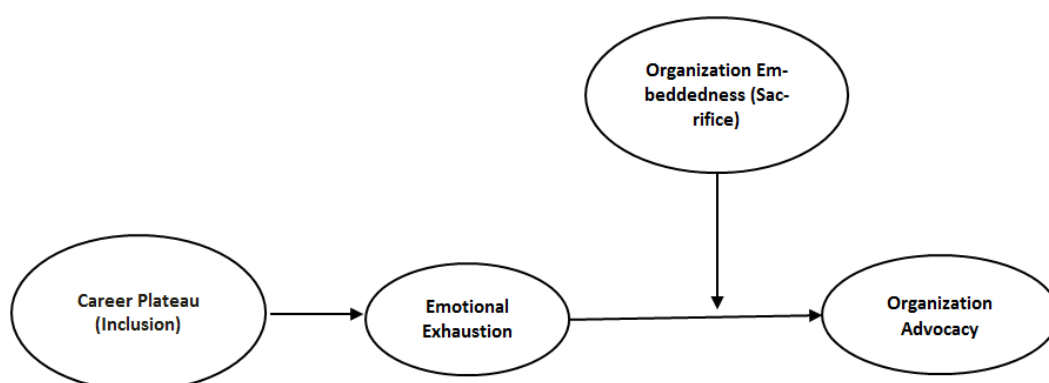


Figure 1. The Model: Inclusion Plateau positively impacts emotional exhaustion, which further negatively impacts organisation advocacy; however, it gets moderated by organisation embeddedness.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Data was collected from the BFSI sector. All 350 employees working in four different companies were identified for the survey. A sample of 290 employees was selected for a tenure of more than six months and who had not resigned. Data was collected for each IP, EE, OA, and OE construct, totalling 27 questions. Questions were administered online through a third-party vendor to maintain the confidentiality of responses. Questions were divided into 2 phases and sent in a gap of 15 days to reduce the common method bias. Of the 290 employees, 252 (87%) responses were received from wave one. Of the 252 who responded to wave one, 234 employees completed wave two surveys (93%). Demographic details like age, experience, marital status, gender, and interest in role change were recorded.

Gender was equally represented in the sample, as was prevalent in the population (24% females). Married people responded more to the survey than those with single marital status (34% Singles). 26% were junior, 49% middle and 24% senior management respondents. Unexpectedly, people wanting to change their career were reported higher (56%).

3.2. Research Instruments

3.2.1. Scale for IP

Questions based on Milliman's [21] CP instrument were used on a 5-point Likert scale, one being "Strongly Disagree" and five being "Strongly Agree". 6-item measured the IP. Questions included, "I don't have opportunities to speak up."

3.2.2. Scale for EE

EE was measured using the 9-item scale from Maslach & Jackson [18]. Questions included, "Working with my colleagues all day is really stressful for me."

3.2.3. Scale for OA

OA was measured using the 2-item employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) questions [24]. Questions included, "Based on my work experience at my company, I will highly recommend my company as a preferred place to work to my friends and colleagues."

3.2.4. Scale for OEs

The 10-item scale developed for 'Sacrifice' in the OE construct developed by Lee, Mitchell and colleagues in 2001 was used. Questions included, "I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job" or "The benefits are good on this job."

SPSS, SPSS - AMOS and SPSS Process ver. 4.0 was used for all analyses [13]. Model 14 was used in the SPSS Process

3.3. Analysis and Results

As the survey was done in 2 phases in a gap of 15 days, scale factor analysis was done. Factors were reduced to single-factor loading in all the IP, OEs, EE and OA variables. Factors were loaded in SPSS-AMOS, and items were reduced to ensure validity and reliability. KMO was at 0.87, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, and all commonalities extraction were >0.5. Cronbach alpha was >0.70 and corrected item-total correlation >0.40, AVE>0.5, AVE>MSV, IFI, TFI, CLI>0.90, RMSEA<0.08. Confirmatory factor analysis was most significant for the 4-factor model. A few of the results are as follows.

Table 1. Discriminant Validity and Correlations.

	CR	AVE	MSV	IP	EE	OEs	OA
IP	0.74	0.50	0.17	0.70			
EE	0.87	0.64	0.47	0.28	0.80		
OEs	0.85	0.66	0.65	-0.35	-0.51	0.81	
OA	0.79	0.66	0.65	-0.42	-0.69	0.81	0.81

IP's composite reliability (CR) is .74, EE is .87, OEs is .85, and OA is .79. All values are above 0.70. The average value extracted (AVE) for IP is .50, EE is .64, OEs is .66, and OA is .66. All values are above .50. Maximum square value (MSV) < AVE for all factors. Discriminant validity across factors is also established as the discriminant value is higher with self than any other factor. For the total model, CMIN / DF is 1.66, within the range of 1.0 to 3.0. RMR is .05, lower than .10; GFI is .95, greater than .90; AGFI is .91, greater than .80. Further, IFI is .98, TLI is .97, and CFI is .98, all greater than .95. RMSE is 0.05, less than the acceptable range of .08, with LO90 at .03 and HI90 at .07, which is also within the acceptable range.

Table 2. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Models	χ^2 (df)	CMIN/DF	GFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
4 Factor model	79 (48)	1.66	.95	.98	.98	.97	.05
3 Factor Model ^b	362(102)	3.55	.82	.86	.86	.83	.10

Models	χ^2 (df)	CMIN/DF	GFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
2 Factor Model ^c	895(105)	8.52	.69	.57	.57	.51	.18
1 Factor model ^d	1248(107)	11.67	.55	.38	.38	.30	.21

^b OA & OEs are merged, ^c OA, OEs and EE are merged, ^d All Items merged

As in Table 2, the proposed 4-factor model of IP, EE, OEs and OA had the best model fit results. In the three-factor model, OEs were combined with OA, as these two factors have the common underlying thread of loyalty. All results were worse than the 4-factor model. Similarly, the 2-factor and 1-factor results were worse than the 3-factor model. Various other permutations were used, and only the 4-factor model gave the best goodness of fit, which was in line with the proposed model.

Data was controlled for gender, management level, and business vs support function. Each standard scale was tested for Cronbach Alpha and was a reliable measure of their respective constructs, with alpha being more significant than the .70 value. Thus, each standard scale used was reliable for the measurements done in the Indian BFSI sector. IP alpha was .73, OEs alpha was .86, EE scale alpha was .87, and for the OA scale, the alpha was .80. IP was significantly negatively correlated to OEs ($r_c = -.27$), positively with EE ($r_c = .28$) and negatively with OA ($r_c = -.34$). OE was signifi-

cantly negatively correlated to EE ($r_c = -.42$) and positively with OA ($r_c = .67$). EE was significantly negatively correlated to OA ($r_c = -.58$). The strengthening of all the correlations with each covariate was more than .30. Hence the impact will be high and relevant.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

SN	Factor	Mean	SD	1	2	3	Alpha
1	IP	2.4	0.69				.73
2	OE's	3.0	0.94	-.27**			.86
3	EE	2.4	0.82	.28**	-.42**		.87
4	OA	3.9	0.76	-.34**	.67**	-.58**	.80

* Correlation is significant at .05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed). All items measure on a 1 to 5 Likert's scale

Table 4. Hypotheses testing for direct, indirect and moderated mediation.

Impact	B	SE	T	Sig. level	Outcome
Total Effect: IP → OA	-.62	.08	-7.68	P<.001	
IP → EE	.60	.08	7.34	P<.001	H1 Supported
EE → OA	-.91	.19	-4.71	P<.001	H2 Supported
OE's → OA	.15	.16	0.89	P>.10	
Moderated: EE x OE's → OA	.18	.05	3.30	P<.01	
Direct and Indirect effect of IP on OA					
	Effect	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	
Direct: IP → OA	-.06	.07	-.20	.07	
Mediated: IP → EE → OA	-.29	.05	-.38	-.18	H3 Supported
Indirect Moderated, Mediating effect of IP on OA at different levels of OE's					
IP → EE x OE's → OA (-1 SD)	-.24	.05	-.35	-.13	
IP → EE x OE's → OA (Mean)	-.17	.04	-.25	-.10	H4 Supported
IP → EE x OE's → OA (+1SD)	-.10	.04	-.18	.02	
Index of Moderating, Mediating					
OE's	.11	.04	.03	.20	

SPSS Process Andrews F Hayes regression model 14 was used to check for direct and indirect effects of mediation variables and moderated mediating effects. People who were not getting included in decision-making were experiencing EE. IP led to EE ($\beta = .60, p < .001$); thus, H1 was supported. Further, as postulated, the regression model proved that EE significantly led to negative OA ($\beta = -.91, p < .001$), thus supporting H2. EE was observed to have mediated the impact of IP on OA ($\beta = -.29, p < .01$). While the direct impact of IP on OA was not significant ($\beta = -.06, CI [-.20, .07]$), EE was observed to fully mediate negatively between IP and OA ($\beta = -.29, CI [-.38, -.18]$), thus supporting Hypothesis 3. These observations establish that the impact of IP on OA gets fully mediated when employees experience EE. Thus, our hypothesis H3 is fully supported.

As is evident in the above tables, the Moderated, mediating effect of IP on OA was negatively significant with moderation effect at higher levels of EE x OEs at -1 SD (Indirect effect: $\beta = -.24, CI [-.35, -.13]$). This effect is lesser and significant at the mean (Indirect effect: $\beta = -.17, CI [-.25, -.10]$) and still further less effect, but becomes non-significant at +1SD (Indirect effect: $\beta = -.10, CI [-.18, .02]$). For simplification, the same has been shown in the below graph, wherein

the slope of the graph between EEs OA at lower OEs is much higher than at higher values of OEs. These results support Hypothesis 4, with OEs moderated positively by the negative mediating effect of EE between IP and OA.

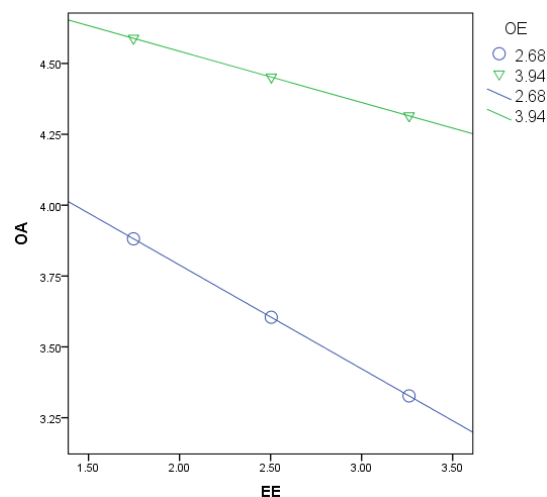


Figure 2. Interaction of Emotional Exhaustion and Organisation Embeddedness on Organisation Advocacy.

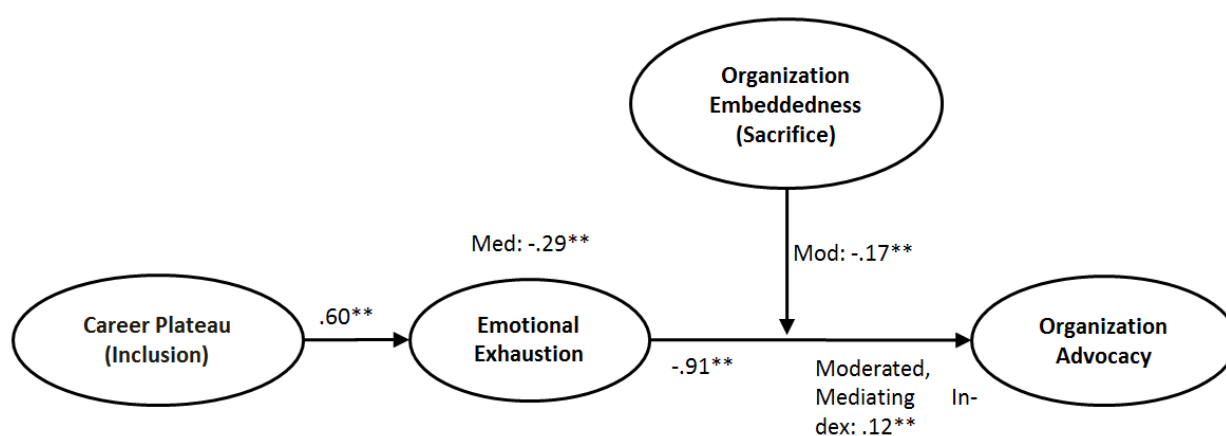


Figure 3. The path Model with standardised path coefficients.

4. Discussions

4.1. Theoretical Implications

Firstly, there have been significant studies on JCP and HP [31]. This research literature adds value by looking at the impact of IP on outcomes. IP had the most significant effect on EE (Hypothesis H1). Using SIT, a prolonged ignorance by the organisation of not including the employee in critical decision-making leaves the employee under stress and anxiety, reducing social identity and leading to EE and poor

mental health. This neglect further aggravates as the employee perceives the capability of contributing to the decision-making process but is not given a chance. Again, the IP is mediated via EE, impacting OA negatively (Hypothesis H3). Employees will never speak positively about the organisation to friends or colleagues under prolonged stress. The survey results also show a statistically significant positive impact of EE on OA (Hypothesis H2), which aligns with previous research studies.

Secondly, studies from 1977 onwards have focused on the impact of CP on perceived organisation support and related consequences. This study looks at the effect of CP on indi-

viduals' EE and associated outcomes. While CP could lead to a perception of lesser external support, like poor supervisor support, it also impacts an individual's cognitive mindset (mental health), which could spill over to other behaviours demonstrated by the employee, like cynicism or counterproductive work behaviours.

Thirdly, significantly less literature links CP to OA. Though organisation advocacy remains a pillar for many organisations to measure employee engagement and loyalty, this literature adds value to research on the antecedent of OA. Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a fundamental scale used by Fortune 500 companies to measure OA and, thus, the participants' engagement level. This literature brings back the focus of causal relations on OA. Three parameters studied here are CP, OE and EE, which impact OA.

Fourthly, employees who are embedded in the organisation and experience a CP would spend more time searching for job rotation and exhibiting organisation loyalty by speaking positively about the organisation to others. However, due to COVID and related online work, employers have less time to socialise with employees and embed them in the organisation. Hence, the current literature states that employees who are not embedded and experience the IP actively engage in negative propaganda about their organisation and are probably seeking jobs outside the company (Hypothesis 4).

4.2. Practical Implications

OA is a simple tool for measuring employee engagement levels in the organisation. Organisations with a lower OA score need to introspect about the causes of the low score by viewing employee issues through the lens of SIT. This literature highlights a few significant reasons for lower OA scores, including employees perceiving a CP and having EE. In a larger organisation, OA scores may also vary from department to department and with a different supervisor. Using the supervisor-level OA score, organisations must carefully evaluate if the supervisor is responsible for the employee experiencing a CP and EE. Immediate managers may often be a hindrance to their subordinates' promotion. Still, they can reduce the negative impact of HP by reducing the IP and involving their aides in decision-making. As the hierarchy reduces, the organisation could rotate employees to different jobs to lessen the effect of JCP.

EE or negative OA is an outcome of a CP. It can be an indicator for managers to note that the subordinate believes their career is plateauing. Managers need to engage with such associates actively. They need to include them more in their decision-making processes to reduce the IP or move them to a different job to lessen the JCP. When hierarchical growth cannot be given to the employee due to various constraints, the managers need to get involved in career discussions with the employee.

Market sentiments and the environment change overnight

in BFSI. The organisation must quickly embed employees better into the organisation. This embedding could be done by increasing the 'cost' of sacrifice, leaving the organisation in material and physiological loss. Tenured employees should be allowed to move around the organisation through job rotations to increase their social network and further embed them within the organisation.

The organisation must 'check in' periodically if an employee is keen on a career change. Instead of losing an employee to external competition, it is better to move the employees who have shown interest in a career change to different roles within the organisation, which is closer to the social identity expectation of the employee, gives a perception of career progression for the employee and related positive outcomes.

4.3. Limitations and Scope for Future Research

Future studies could focus on other subconstructs of CP, like the Personal Plateau, Life Plateau, Professional Plateau, Employment Plateau, and Occupational Plateau. Longitudinal studies must explore the interplay between organisation and individual response, as CP affects the process. Mediating and moderating should be combined with other factors to study the consequences of CP.

Job market cyclic trends and their impact on intent for a career change could be studied further. When jobs are in demand, people may get interested in changing jobs and believe they are not progressing as fast as possible during recession times when jobs are few. The talent supply is high due to layoffs, wherein they may have contended with current careers.

Antecedents leading to CP could be further studied, including the impact of career adaptability on CP with mediating constructs like supervisors' support and adopting responses like career planning and exploration. To further reduce common method bias, supervisor feedback should also be taken. Further, a gap of 15 days could be increased to 3 months for better results.

5. Conclusion

A career plateau leads to stress and emotional exhaustion for an individual. Emotional exhaustion is a negative state of mind (poor mental health) that impacts the organisation negatively, resulting in reduced organisation advocacy by the individual. This reduced advocacy could be mitigated by embedding employees within the organisation. While the career plateau could have various subconstructs, the inclusion plateau had the maximum impact on the rest of the research parameters: emotional exhaustion and organisation advocacy. Due to fewer new job opportunities, many employees intending to change jobs may not get one quickly. A career plateau in their current job could lead to emotional exhaustion. A career-plateaued, emotionally exhausted em-

ployee would only speak favourably about the organisation if adequately embedded.

Abbreviations

SIT	Social Identity Theory
CP	Career Plateau
IP	Inclusion Plateau
JCP	Job Content Plateau
HP	Hierarchy Plateau
EE	Emotional Exhaustion
OE	Organisational Embeddedness
OE _s	Organisational Embeddedness (sacrifice)
OA	Organisation Advocacy

Author Contributions

Vivek Jain is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Biography

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