Is career plateau a relevant concept in the Irish Financial Sector post Celtic Tiger years?

Natasha Herbst-Bergin

Master of Arts in Human Resource Management
National College of Ireland

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Abstract

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Career development is mainly concerned with how a career evolves towards some degree of success, which is dependent on prestige promotional job titles and a balancing act of the career triangle - work, associations with colleagues and personal development. When the career triangle is out of balance due to provisional organisational constraints, the reverse – career plateau - can be distressing and may lead to a number of negative work attitudes. The purpose of this study is to examine the affects of four career plateau typologies (structural, job content, double and professional plateau) on three work attitudes namely job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions. This study will also explore the coping strategies employees in the Irish Financial Sector select to cope with lack of challenges and promotions in their job.

Structural plateau is controlled by restrictions put in place due to pyramidal organisational structures which give rise to the lack of promotional opportunities leading to poor performance, increase in job dissatisfaction and reduce moral. Job content plateau generates an overall stagnation on the job due to lack of challenges and boredom whereas professional plateau is caused by job content plateau and lacking professional development. Double plateau is when an individual experience both structural and job content plateau simultaneously.

Full time permanent employees, who are over the age of 30, with more than three years' service within the same organisation, were asked to participate in this study. Data was collected from 56 recipients working in three multinational investment banks based in the Irish Financial Service Centre. This research adopted a quantitative, deductive approach, comprising of an anonymous online self-administered questionnaire with a 59 percent response rate. The findings show that turnover intentions had positive correlations with structural plateau and double plateau, whilst having a negative correlation with professional plateau. Job satisfaction and career satisfaction only had a positive correlation with professional plateau and did not relate to any of the other three typologies of career plateau. The most frequently reported career plateau coping strategies were job involvement (44.6%), job withdrawal (16.1%), non-work activities (12.6%), while mental coping (7.1%) and discuss problem (1.8%) were the least frequently reported.

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In loving memory of Flo.

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List of Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation
Career Satisfaction	CS
Double Plateau	DP
Human Resources	HR
Hypothesis	H
Irish Financial Sector	IFS
Irish Financial Service Centre	IFSC
Job Content Plateau	JCP
Job Satisfaction	JS
Job Satisfaction Survey	JSS
Mean	M
Pearson Correlation	R
Professional Plateau	PP
Research Objectives	RO
Standard Deviation	SD
Statistical Package for Social Science	SPSS
Structural Plateau	SP
Turnover Intentions	TI

"Everyone knows a story about a smart and talented businessperson who has lost his or her passion for work, who no longer looks forward to going to the office yet remains stuck without a visible way out."

(Herminia Ibarra, 2002)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1   Background

The transformation of the world of work since the 2008 economic crash can be characterised by widespread changes in organisational structures to respond quickly to the increasing need to retain corporate competitiveness (Lapalme, Tremblay and Simard, 2009). European banks have been forced to implement major restructuring and cost reducing strategies to slowly return to their profitable state once again. Moreover, in Ireland, the Irish Financial Sector (IFS) responded to the global financial crisis by reducing headcount figures to aid corporate survival. According to redundancy figures post Celtic Tiger years (period after 2008), approximately 12,000 jobs were lost in the IFS alone (Carswell, 2012). In light of this, organisations are faced with the prospect to maintain a level of satisfaction, retain key talent and uphold employee engagement post restructuring phases (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006; Feldman, 1996).

In any event, it is inevitable that traditional hierarchical pyramid shaped organisations will be flattened by the introduction of the latter reforms. The knock on effect from these reforms are that employees are likely to remain longer in the same position, narrowing down their career development path and delaying the likelihood of future promotional opportunities. The culture of career success and progression in the IFS would have traditionally been to quickly climb the corporate ladder, yet today employees will be faced with a temporary suspension of professional development at a much earlier age than a few generations ago. A

study by Ference, Stoner, and Kirby Warren (1977) stereotyped structural plateaued employees as "failures", "deadwood" or even "shelf sitters". However, the significant truth behind this type of plateau is that it can be described as a natural, foreseeable and developmental experience affecting nearly everyone at some stage in his or her career and not as a result of the individual's failure alone (Leibowitz, Kaye and Farren, 1990). Bardwick (1986) refers to this as the "the rule of 99%", which dictates that only one percent will make it to the highest level of the hierarchy, leaving the 99% exposed to structural plateau. Job content plateau occurs when talented employees reached a "brick wall" within their career that delivers no further career progression and leads to feelings of anxiety, job dissatisfaction, loss of motivation, lack of challenges and tension (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001). It is also believed, that this type of plateau sets the wheels in motion for employees to re-evaluate their skills set to ensure their marketability and employability before resigning from their current employer (Duffy, 2000). A third construct, namely double plateau, is when an employee experiences both structural and job content plateau simultaneously (McCleese, Eby, Scharlau and Hoffman, 2007). Professional plateau is not only concerned with the content of the job (job content plateau), but also whether the job allows the employee to gain new skills to enhance future employability (Lee, 2003). As today's careers have become a "patchwork" of jobs (Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002), it is evident that by adding professional plateau (Lee, 2003) as another dimension to the understanding of career plateau, it can enrich and broaden this study.

The literature above demonstrates that employees who climb the corporate ladder too quickly are in fact yesterday's problems. Today, a substantial concern for organisations is to ensure that career stagnation does not end in a significant increase in educated employees who are stuck in their career following the rapid decline in promotional programmes in the aftermath of extensive restructuring (Nachbagauer and Reidl, 2002; Carlson and Rotondo, 2001).

1.2   Title

The discussions above have led to the following research title:

"Is career plateau a relevant concept in the Irish Financial Sector post Celtic Tiger years?"

1.3   Aim and objectives of the research

The aim of this study is to build on the existing research of career plateau in three ways. Firstly, to determine what types of career plateau are present within multinational investment banks* in Ireland. Secondly, to investigate the positive work related attributes (namely job satisfaction and career satisfaction) and work withdrawal behaviour (namely turnover intentions) and their relationship with career plateau typologies (structural, job content, double and professional plateau). Thirdly, to explore the coping strategies Irish employees utilise when they encounter a career plateau. The overall research objective (RO) and sub objectives of this study are listed below:

Overall RO: Are positive work related attributes and withdrawal behaviour affected by dysfunctional career plateaus among professional employees, working in the IFS, post Celtic Tiger years?

RO1: To determine whether objective versus subjective measurements of career plateau affects the work attitudes** of professionals in the IFS.

RO2: To investigate the degree to which structural plateau and job content plateau affects the work attitudes of professionals in the IFS.

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* If the examiner wishes to get more information on the three multinational investment banks in Ireland, the researcher will provide it upon request.

** Work attitudes refer to the three dependent variables namely job satisfaction and career satisfaction (work related attributes) and turnover intentions (withdrawal behaviour).

RO3: To ascertain whether professional plateau affects the work attitudes of professionals in the IFS.

RO4: To explore the different coping strategies professionals in the IFS employ to reduce the negative work attitudes attributed to career plateau.

1.4   Process of this study

The process of this research study will be purely quantitative. The same process was also followed by Jung and Tak (2009), Burke and Mikkelsen (2006) and Lee (2003). The methodology is a survey and the data collection method is a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 60 closed-ended questions, two open-ended questions and seven demographic questions.

The methodological procedure that was not used in this study was a semi-structured interview process as the precedence set by empirical studies are that quantitative research forms an excellent research strategy to identify the prevalence of career plateau. As this study was aimed at testing the extent to which a phenomenon existed rather than the subjective, in-depth perceptions of this process, making quantitative research the most appropriate strategy for research requirements.

This study excluded employees in their 20s and fixed term contract employees as the former are typically at a key learning developmental stage of their career and the latter do not participate in the organisations' career development system. Previous research studies also shows that career plateau predominately focused on older managers in the period just before retirement and mainly looking at teachers, police officers and sales force workers for having less scope of promotional opportunities within their careers.

In view of the arguments above, previous research typically focuses on sectors known for having relatively rigid, hierarchical progression structures such as civil servants. This study adds to existing literature by exploring career plateau caused by external market forces within a sector previously associated with a high level of career flexibility and growth. For that reason, this study mainly focuses on employees over the age of 30, working across all levels within Irish investment banks (front office, back office and supporting roles).

1.5   Limitation of this study

The limitation of this study was that Human Resources (HR) professionals did not feel comfortable to circulate the survey to employees within their organisation as they felt that the concept was directed at negative work attitudes. Following the implementation of aggressive restructuring strategies, HR professionals explained that their employees are at a vulnerable stage and their main objective for 2014 is to preserve the knowledge pool and lock in key talent who are essential to the organisation. As a result of this limitation a lower response rate was expected for this study.

1.6   Structure of report

The structure of the report will be as follows:
Chapter One: Provides a background, supported by potential significance to areas of proposed research in the context of IFS post restructuring phase.

Chapter Two: This chapter reviews the four types of career plateau (structural, job content, double and professional plateau) and their relationship with career satisfaction, job satisfaction and turnover intentions. This chapter also reviews the potential career plateau coping strategies used from an organisational and individual perspective.

Chapter Three: This chapter identifies the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research; it outlines the research questions, strategy and data collection methods. It also covers the methodology framework, sample, population of study, ethical considerations and validity and reliability issues.

Chapter Four: This chapter reports the findings, hypotheses results and discusses the outcomes based on the research objectives.

Chapter Five: This chapter outlines the overall conclusion on the research study. It also provides an outline of recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Overview

"The plateau effect will show you why the world is full of one-hit wonders, why all good things come to an end, why all trends eventually fall, why most people get less for more and how you can break through again and again."

(Sullivan and Thompson, 2013, pp. xi)

It was during the Celtic Tiger (period from 1995 to 2008) that organisations in Ireland proliferated in size, which opened the pathway for employees to fast track their career. The well-established tradition of linear promotional programmes, are still seen today as a remarkably positive and psychological life changing experience for all employees. A promotion signifies a title change that delivers new challenges, provides incentives and additional perks (Ettington, 1998; Appelbaum and Santiago, 1997; Baker, Jenson and Murphy, 1988). However, today's workplace has been severely affected by the current financial crisis and the need to implement continuous change strategies to assume a leaner and flatter organisational structure.

The renowned hierarchical organisational structures have been rehabilitated, by shrinking middle level manager positions to obtain a more horizontal (flatter) structure (Appelbaum and Santiago, 1997). The implication to the latter is that several managerial job levels are being made redundant, leaving a bottleneck of employees who are waiting for their turn to progress upwards on the narrow career

path. The stark reality of inadequate promotional opportunities for future mobility is the type of atmosphere employees in the IFS are currently faced with. In view of this, recent studies suggested that career stagnation could lead to a sharp decline in positive work related attributes and behaviours (McCleese *et al*., 2007; Lee, 2003). This may even be associated with The Peter Principle, where an individual gets promoted to their "level of incompetence" (Ettington, 1997; Bardwick, 1986; Peter and Hall, 1969), suggesting a misalignment in the promotion process (Lazear, 2004). However, this study will not seek to ascertain whether individuals should or should not be promoted but merely whether they are experiencing a plateau and the consequences thereof.

Given these dramatic changes in organisations, career theories moved towards a protean career model (Hall, 1985), which provided the impetus for research on career plateau to re-emerge (Rotondo and Perrewé, 2000). Sullivan and Thompson (2013, pp. xvi) describe a career plateau as follows:

> "A real plateau means you have stopped growing. It means your mind and senses are being dulled by sameness, by a routine that sucks the life and soul out of you, by getting less and less out of life while doing more and more. Plateaus ultimately force you to make bad decisions and feel desperate."

The career plateau theory was primarily developed towards older managers (individuals between 50 and 68 years of age) for having structured careers, transferable skills (Hofstetter and Cohan, 2014), no immediate plans for retirement and the redundancy of future promotional opportunities (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013). The research findings supported this theory and established that managers at mid-career levels, with an average age of 54 years, were more prone to have experienced career plateau than their subordinates (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013). However, recent studies by Smith-Ruig (2009) and Nachbagauer and Riedl

(2002) reported that Generation X employees (individuals who are roughly between the ages of early 30s and late 40s) are starting to feel like they do not know what the next step entails in order for them to progress upwards. Furthermore, Miles, Gordan, and Storlie (2013) found that employees with two or less years' service indicated that career advancement was more important to them compared to an employee who has been with their organisation for more than seven years. Other studies confirmed that a career plateau can develop anywhere between three to five years tenure especially when the employee lacks a challenging job (Miles *et al*., 2013). Conversely, the discrepancies with these theories are that the psychological, social and organisational factors leading to a career plateau and the exact time frame when an individual will be in a plateaued stage will vary from person to person (Lee, 2003).

The above theories will be developed further in this study. Thus, the proposed definition that will guide this study will be to include all permanent employees working in the IFS, who are over the age of 30, with three or more years' service and who still demonstrate the passion for future career progression.

This definition has four advantages. Firstly, the definition will assist this study to ascertain whether the career plateau effect is a relevant concept among employees in the IFS. Secondly, it consciously uncouples the relationship between organisational and individual factors that could lead to a career plateau effect. Thirdly, this study will not label career plateau to be experienced only by older workers but instead to include a diverse scope of professionals who are above the age of 30 years. Fourthly, to explore what coping strategies employees in the IFS would apply to overcome this temporary battle.

2.1.1 Limitations of work on career plateau

Firstly, early empirical research on career plateau has been treated narrowly by focusing mainly on two plateau typologies (structural and job content plateau), the dichotomy (plateaued versus non-plateaued employees) and their association with antecedents and consequences. Previous research also implies that career plateau was predominately studied from an organisational perspective (structural plateau and job content plateau) and little empirical research has been reported on an individual's perception (professional plateau). From literature researchers, only one study conducted by Lee (2003) demonstrates professional plateau as another dimension to the understanding of career plateau.

Secondly, there remains no unanimous agreement among researchers on the relationship between work related attributes (job satisfaction and career satisfaction) and work withdrawal behaviour (turnover intentions) on career plateau. For example, Salami's (2010) study showed that career plateau was negatively correlated to job satisfaction and positively to turnover intentions. A recent study by Miles *et al*. (2013) found a significantly positive relationship between job content plateau and job satisfaction. Ongori and Agolla (2009) found no significant relationship among plateaued employees and job satisfaction. Nachbagauer and Riedl (2002) found that job satisfaction was only visible from a subjective dimension. The last example from Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel (2009) found a negative correlation between career satisfaction and job content plateau. It seems there is much to be discovered about the consequences of career plateau in organisations.

Thirdly, strategies to cope with career plateau were mainly investigated from an organisational perspective and little research has been conducted from an employee's perspective. The researcher is only aware of two studies that explore

coping strategies from an individual's perspective (Hurst, Kungu and Flott, 2012; McCleese *et al.*, 2007).

2.1.2   Organisational context

The traditional culture, facilitated by the rapid growth of the financial sector, was one of career success and upward mobility. An individual employed in the IFS would have reasonably expected to climb the corporate ladder, yet today employees are more likely to be faced with a temporary suspension of professional development. As Irish investment banks continue to go through the transformation stages, the number of plateaued employees are likely to rise at a much earlier age than previous generations leading to a decrease in job satisfaction (Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010), reduced career satisfaction (Yean and Yahya, 2013) and an increase in turnover intentions (Ongori and Agolla, 2009).

2.2   Definitions

The key definitions on which this study is developed around in the literature review are outlined below.

Irish Financial Sector (IFS)

The IFS referred to in this study will focus on multinational investment banks in Dublin, Ireland. Generally, careers within these organisations are categorised into front office, middle/back office and support roles. Front office can be described as revenue generating roles, which is fast moving and working in pressurised environments. Back office (e.g. Operations Team) and support roles (e.g. HR, legal, risk, compliance) are more stable, meaning there might be a limited scope for upward mobility (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013).

Career plateauing

The orthodox definition of career plateau by Ference *et al*. (1977, p. 602) is still renowned today as "the point where the likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very low". However, in practice, employees would define plateauing as an unforeseen and unduly prolonged halt in future career mobility leading to career stagnation and a role that takes on the form of sameness (Bhavani and Prasad, 2013; Appelbaum and Santiago, 1997; Hall, 1985; Slocum, Cron, Hansen and Rawlings, 1985).

Older managers

Older managers ("Baby Boom generation") would be employees who are aged 50 years and over, who continue to stay in employment rather than retiring (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013).

2.3   Career plateau

2.3.1   Measuring career plateau

Plateau versus non-plateau employees

A model of managerial careers (see Appendix 1) developed by Ference *et al*. (1977) delineates four principal career stages of the plateauing process outlined as deadwood, learners, stars and solid citizens (Duffy, 2000; Slocum *et al*., 1985). These four career stages are interwoven between two parameters of succession planning such as current performance and the future potential for career progression (Appelbaum and Finestone, 1994).

The most significant implication with this model has been the challenge for management to prevent solid citizens from slipping into the deadwood category

(Ference *et al*., 1977). Duffy's (2000) study confirms that in practice, managers would rather focus on the most extreme performance continuum cases such as deadwood and stars by leaving solid citizens to defend for themselves. While these points make a compelling argument in favour of the career plateau effect to be present among employees in the IFS, there are still a number of counterparts to this phenomenon that ought to be explored.

Operationalising and conceptualising of career plateau

The pervasiveness of empirical research on career plateau in the early eighties has operationalised it by using various objective measurements such as age (Salami, 2010; Lee, 2003; Feldman and Weitz, 1988; Veiga, 1981), job tenure (Nachagauer and Riedl, 2002; Hall, 1985; Gould and Penley, 1984), vertical and lateral movements (Slocum *et al*., 1985; Viega, 1981), time lapsed between promotions (Evans and Gilbert, 1984) and demographic backgrounds (Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010; Near, 1984) to determine, define and distinguish between the dichotomy of career plateau. Furthermore, previous researchers also reported that by operationalising career plateau using arbitrarily defined cut-off points (the norm being three to five years in the same job) would generate shortcomings (Lee, 2003; Chay, Aryee and Chew, 1995). Therefore, as an objective dimension tends to overlook the realistic measurements of capturing an individual's perceptions of being plateaued (Chao, 1990) researchers in the nineties lean towards the argument of conceptualising the construct as a subjective dimension instead.

The subjective dimension of career plateau emphasises on how the individual perceives, assess and reacts to the present work situation (Chao, 1990) and their perception of the likelihood of future promotions (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006). A recent study by Nachbagauer and Riedl (2002) confirmed that subjective measurements are internal to the individual, grounded on future expectations of work goals and based on self-assessment of promotional chances. Therefore, this

form of measurement will account for a substantial variance on work related attributes and withdrawal behaviour than operational measures alone (Tremblay and Roger, 2004; Ettington, 1998; Tremblay, Roger and Toulouse, 1995; Chao, 1990). Thus, the following hypothesis (H) will be tested as identified by Nachbagauer and Riedl (2002):

H1:   The impact of subjective measurements (feelings internal to the individual) will account for more variance than objective measurements (feelings external to the individual such as age and time in service) when compared to job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions.

On the contrary, recent studies confirmed that the negative effects of plateauing can be both social and psychological, thus a subjective measurement of career plateau should not be used in isolation when measuring the phenomenon (Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002). As both dimensions stem from the immobility to advance up the corporate ladder it is proposed to marry the two variables (objective and subjective) into one construct, referred to as structural plateau (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006).

2.3.2   Typologies of career plateau

Structural plateau

Structural plateau is virtually inevitable, as it will affect everyone at some stage in his or her career. Overactive structural plateaus can generate significant problems for an employee, especially when a promotion is an overwhelming symbol of status, significance and success (Weiner, Remer and Remer, 1992; Bardwick, 1986). Therefore, it can be complex in nature as it is triggered by restrictions inherited to the organisational hierarchy (Montgomery, 2002; Duffy, 2000) that can leave an employee frustrated, less motivated and powerless.

This seemingly immovable obstacle (Sullivan and Thompson, 2013) can be symbolised as being in an elevator with no more buttons to advance up to the next level (Bardwick, 1986). In view of this, pyramid shaped organisations (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006) are notorious for acting as a "funnel effect" that can spark the effects of structural plateau resulting in a narrow chance for further career development (Beheshtifar and Modaber, 2013). The vogue towards a flatter organisational structure in order to reduce costs (Appelbaum and Santiago, 1997) is prevalent today and can be associated with a reduction in job satisfaction and an increase in turnover intentions (Brown-Wilson and Parry, 2013). Ultimately, structural plateau could be considered as the worst-case scenario for employees to cope with in the IFS.

Job content plateau

It has been consistently suggested in empirical research that after three years into a new role, an employee will unconsciously start to generate an overall stagnation in the job (Hofstetter and Cohan, 2014; Duffy, 2000). This could be due to boredom, when an individual has learned the job too well and are no longer challenged by their work (Leibowitz *et al*., 1990) resulting in a shortfall of new challenges, varied tasks and responsibilities within their role (Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002). In principle, employees can be susceptible to job content plateau; unlike structural plateau, job content plateau is avoidable and reversible (Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002). It is possible for an employee to experience both constructs (structural and job content plateau) simultaneously, which is referred to as "double plateau" (Peterson and Jun, 2007; McCleese *et al*., 2007; Allen, Russell, Poteet and Dobbins, 1999). The instrument for measuring career plateau (structural and job content), which was introduced by McCleese *et al*. (2007), will be employed in this study.

Professional plateau

Structural plateau and job content plateau fashioned a feeble overview of the career plateau effect due to their main focus from an organisational perspective. As traditional career theories were controlled by the organisation (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001), it is believed that employees should be self-reliant and take ownership of their own career success rather than leaving it up to the organisation (Lee, 2003). Carlson and Rotondo (2001, p. 99) contends that:

> "The idea that successful careers will be driven by the individual and not the organisation suggests that an employee's internal career map is a critical variable in the ability to adjust to changing work environment."

The domino effect of professional plateau is becoming prominent among employees today, especially now that an employer-controlled upward trajectory (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013) has shifted towards the individual's responsibility to progress in their profession (Lee, 2003). A recent study (Lee, 2003) reported that professional plateau could be a significant variable for employees to upgrade their skills linking it to career satisfaction and job satisfaction. It can also be highly relevant to HR professionals who are developing strategies to motivate and nurture employees' professional development. Therefore, Lee's (2003) instrument for measuring professional plateau will be used to measure this construct among employees in the IFS.

2.3.3 Consequences of career plateau

Each individual may develop a career plateau based solely on his or her own personal definition of career success. Nevertheless, it is evident in the career development literature that overactive career plateaus have been associated and used as an antecedent to a variety of undesirable work attitudes. Even though the

findings to the consequences of career plateau have been inconsistent over the past two decades (Ettington, 1998; Choy and Savery, 1998; Feldman and Weitz, 1988), it is becoming an increasingly widespread concern that needs to be acknowledged and addressed by organisations (Hofstetter and Cohan, 2014; Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013; Peterson and Jun, 2007; McCleese *et al.*, 2007).

Positive consequences

The theory of successful career plateauing would like us to accept that an employee can indeed reach a permanent state of feeling plateaued and still be successful in their role (Ettington, 1998; 1997). This statement might come across as an oxymoron. However, there are employees who have consciously decided not to advance up the corporate ladder (Ongori and Agolla, 2009) and are "happy" with the status quo (Lapalme *et al.*, 2009). This could also be more prominent among female employees who willingly choose to pull out of the race to the top and instead pursue the "mommy track" (Hill, Martinson, Ferris and Baker, 2004).

Another societal shift is that employees recently started to place greater emphasis on their lives outside work (McCleese *et al.*, 2007). For example, the reason why they freely choose not to advance in their career might be their preference towards a work life balance over a promotion, which could mean more responsibilities and longer working hours. Then again, a number of researchers firmly disagree with the latter; if an employee does not progress further in their career they run the risk of an unchallenging and repetitive job in the long term (Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010; Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006; Lee, 2003; Montgomery, 2002). It is, therefore, inevitable that these individuals would react negatively towards certain work attitudes and could be in a position to slip into the deadwood category.

Negative consequences

Dysfunctional plateauing fundamentally tends to remove promotional opportunities as a valued outcome and may lead to a decline in career motivation (Hays, 2012) resulting in less effective job satisfaction (Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010; Montgomery, 2002), lower organisational commitment (Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002), negative social interactions with co-workers (Bardwick, 1986) and reduced job performance (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006; Lee, 2003; Zaremba, 1994; Bardwick, 1986). Career plateau has also been a strong contributor to work related withdrawal behaviour such as resignations (Ongori and Agolla, 2009), absenteeism and various psychological outcomes that results in higher levels of stress and depression in one's career (Behehtifar and Modeber, 2013; McCleese *et al.,* 2007; Carlson and Rotondo, 2001; Elsass and Ralston, 1989). However, not all studies have revealed significant differences (Ettington, 1998; Weiner *et al.,* 1992) between plateau and non-plateaued employees (Slocum *et al.,* 1985) in terms of job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions.

While the career plateau concept has been addressed in detail above, this study still needs to acquire more information on the relationship between career plateau and the three work attitudes (job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions). This study will also explore the potential coping strategies employees use to reduce the negative work attitudes.

2.4   Career plateau and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction can be described as the extent to which an individual exuberates a positive emotional state towards an overall experience of their job. This could also be the key ingredient for organisations to sustain success, performance and productivity among their employees. The individual's ability to reduce the gap

between unrealistic future forecasts and actual reality might be related to job satisfaction (Tremblay *et al*., 1995). Empirical research reinforces this belief that when the two expectations are misaligned, job dissatisfaction and structural plateau yields a number of negative outcomes such as absenteeism (Behehtifar and Modeber, 2013), reduction in job performance (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006), lower organisational commitment (Nachagauer and Riedl, 2002) and depression (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001). Furthermore, recent studies (Lee, 2003; Nachagauer and Riedl, 2002) reported that job content plateau significantly related to a decrease in job satisfaction. However, Ongori and Agolla (2009) maintain that there will be plateaued individuals who, remarkably, do not express the traditional negative qualities associated with this concept as they continue to uphold the same level of productivity and satisfaction within their role. Interestingly, this could be due to individuals acquiring new skills to support and motivate them with further advancement in their career and profession. As a result, professional plateau could be a significant variable linking job satisfaction with career plateau (Lee, 2003).

Locating the true origin of why an employee becomes dissatisfied with their job is part of the battle towards improving the level of job satisfaction. Although the theoretical models would like us to accept that there is a partnership between job satisfaction and career plateau, the evidence still proves that previous studies seldom arrived at conclusive results (Tremblay *et al*., 1995). Thus, in this study the following hypothesis was drawn:

H2a: The impact of lack of challenges (job content plateau) and lack of promotions (structural plateau) will be negatively related to job satisfaction.

2.5   Career plateau and career satisfaction

Career satisfaction is the lifelong sequence of role related experiences, which is incorporated by the employee's feelings of satisfaction, and perceptions of their career progression (Yean and Yahya, 2013; Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010). Therefore, if an employee retains their career satisfaction as they age they will have a lower intention to leave the organisation. At the same time, older employees who have a positive outlook on their careers may evaluate their jobs more favourable, even when they are facing a career plateau (Hofstetter and Cohen, 2014). However, Generation X employees might be more sensitive to career dissatisfaction and may lead to an increase in career plateau (Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel, 2009). Thus, the proposed hypothesis:

H2b: The impact of lack of challenges (job content plateau) and lack of promotions (structural plateau) will be negatively related to career satisfaction.

2.6   Career plateau and turnover intentions

The secret to maintaining key talent during change initiatives, especially those at a plateau stage, would be considered a valuable guide for both the individual and organisation (Omar, Anuar, Salleh and Yaakop, 2014). Therefore, if an individual were still optimistic about future progression and development within a recovered organisation they would have less intention to leave (McCleese *et al*., 2007). However, research suggested that when the prospect of upward movement is no longer viable in organisations, turnover intentions were strongly linked to job dissatisfaction, which is spurred on by the lack of promotional opportunities and challenges in their role (Emberland and Rundmo, 2010). The results obtained from

Choy and Savery (1998) indicated that plateaued employees who do not acquire the skills to progress to a higher position would leave their organisation in order to develop those skills somewhere else.

Therefore, several research studies found that seminal models of turnover intentions have the concepts of structural plateau, job content plateau and professional plateau embedded within them (Heilmann, Holt and Rilovick, 2008). For example, Salami (2010) found that job content plateau and structural plateau were positively related to turnover intentions. A recent study by Foster, Lonial and Shastri (2011) also found that career plateau and turnover intentions had a positive correlation with each other while Lee (2003) found that career plateau did not relate to turnover intentions. Professional plateau had a significantly positive correlation with turnover intentions (Lee, 2003). Thus, the following hypotheses:

H3:   *The impact of professional plateau will be negatively related to career satisfaction and job satisfaction, and positively related to turnover intentions*.

H4:   *Structural, job content and double plateau will be positively related to turnover intentions*.

2.7   Coping with a career plateau

As much as you would not treat a serious wound with a single band-aid, so should an organisation and HR professionals alike carefully address the negative effects of a career plateau (Conner, 2014). Researchers have recently embarked on identifying potential problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies as a conscious effort to aid employees and organisations to take proactive steps to

overcome the negative effects of a career plateau (Hust, Kungo and Flutt 2012; Lentz and Allen, 2009; Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006; Rotondo and Perrewé, 2000). Coping strategies were mainly studied from an organisational perspective to reduce the negative effects of structural plateau and job content plateau (Weiner *et al.*, 1992) as a result of pro-active responses (career planning programs, job enrichment, cross-training initiatives) and reactive responses (outplacement services, referral to EAP and counselling). A study conducted by Rotondo and Perrewé (2000) suggested a list of positive and negative strategies that organisations can utilise to cope with the plateaued syndrome. The positive coping strategies are to foster continued psychological growth on the job, which are believed to minimise the plateau effect. For example, organisations can introduce special team based projects (Rotondo and Perrewé, 2000), present realistic promotional expectations by linking career advancement to performance (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006), provide alternative solutions to impractical promotional expectations (Rotondo and Perrewé, 2000), and to offer new short term job assignments (Hall 1985). A framework for designing effective coping strategies will depend on each organisations' policy and practice and most importantly the employees' capacity to adapt to stressful situations.

The negative coping strategies would imply that an employee would psychologically withdraw from the job and blame their supervisor or organisation (Hurst *et al.*, 2012). However, a recent study conducted by Lentz and Allen (2009) argued that coping strategies might depend on the type of plateau experienced by an employee and the activities the employee is engaged in to manage their unique career experience (Hurst *et al.*, 2012). In understanding how employees, who are at a plateaued stage, deal with this syndrome, would reveal the psychological, behavioural and cognitive mechanisms that are linked to job dissatisfaction and intention to leave the organisation (McCleese *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, this study will use McCleese *et al.* (2007) research instrument for content analysis of open-

ended questions to expand on the coping inventories by continuing to fill the gap in literature of unidentified career plateau coping strategies.

2.8 Conclusion

Previous research shows that career plateau has predominately focused on older managers in the period just before retirement and mainly looking at other professions for having less scope of promotional opportunities within their careers. Of the plateauing related research, it appears the main focus was on examining structural and job content plateau together. However, very few studies examined all four typologies of plateauing (structural, job content, double and professional plateau) simultaneously in one study.

It is evident that dysfunctional plateauing can be a negative outcome for both the individual and organisation, if not dealt with properly. Plateaued employees will start to become dissatisfied with their jobs, have reduced motivation, increased absenteeism and a drop in performance standards, which ultimately ends in negative work attitudes. Moreover, very few research studies have examined career plateau coping strategies from an employees' perspective. The few studies that did, mainly focused on closed-ended questions from an organisational perspective rather than understanding what coping strategies plateaued employees utilise to deal with being plateaued. Another limitation is that career plateau coping strategies only seem to focus on structural plateau (employer controlled) instead of looking at the broader sense to include job content and professional plateau (employee controlled) from an Irish employee's perspective (McCleese *et al.,* 2007). Therefore, these issues could be considered a serious gap in the current research, which needs to be addressed.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter will outline the research methodology, which contains information on the philosophical theory of knowledge (Horn, 2009), the processes utilised for conducting research and what assumptions underpin the research (Quinlan, 2011). It also contains the methodological framework for this study. The purpose of the methodological framework is to ensure that every aspect in the research study "fits" the purpose and focus on the study (Quinlan, 2011). For that reason, a theoretical background and justification of the research methodology, population and sample of this study, data collection methods, data gathering methods, issues of validity and reliability and ethical consideration will be covered in this chapter.

3.2   Research objectives

As indicated in the previous chapter, the research objectives being investigated in this study are as follows:

RO1:   To determine whether objective versus subjective measurements of career plateau affects the work attitudes of professionals in the IFS.

A number of researchers have compared the two independent measurements of career plateau and found that subjective measurements (namely structural and job

content plateau) disclose a substantial variance in work attitudes whereas objective measurements (namely age and time in service) are merely an operationalisation of Ference *et al*.'s (1977) definition of the concept (Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002). H1 will attempt to test and apply this in the IFS.

RO2: To investigate the degree to which structural plateau and job content plateau affects the work attitudes of professionals in the IFS.

RO3: To ascertain whether professional plateau affects the work attitudes of professionals in the IFS.

A recent study conducted by Lee (2003) of 170 engineers in Singapore, found that career plateau and professional plateau related negatively to career satisfaction and job satisfaction whilst only professional plateau related positively to turnover intentions. In Salami's (2010) study of 280 government employees, structural plateau and job content plateau were negatively related to job satisfaction and positively to turnover intentions. However, in Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera (2010) of 119 IT professionals, career plateau did make make a significant contribution to career satisfaction. H2a, H2b, H3 and H4 will attempt to apply and test these variables in the IFS.

RO4: To explore the different coping strategies professionals in the IFS employ to reduce the negative work attitudes spurred on by career plateau.

A study by McCleese *et al*. (2007) of 77 doctoral students, found that by categorising coping strategies, using content analysis as open-ended questions in a survey, allows the researcher to conduct a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of what employees in a plateaued stage will exploit to cope with this concept. Research objective 4 will attempt to apply this method in IFS.

3.3   Population of the study

In this study, the focus was mainly on employees working in the IFS due to the volatile economic downturn since the 2008 financial crises, which has led to an earlier career stagnation compared to previous generations.

The first population of this study is defined as plateaued employees with permanent contracts and the second population will be non-plateaued employees with permanent contracts who are also working in the IFS.

3.4   Sample and sampling method

The three investments banks from where this study's population were employed were based in the Irish Financial Service Centre (IFSC) in Dublin and have recently undergone restructuring, which may imputed to career plateau. The aim of this study is to investigate the negative work attitudes, which are influenced by a dysfunctional career plateau. It is important to note that each of the three investment banks will have different policies and practices regarding internal career progression. Furthermore, within these three investment banks, it is evident that employees' roles may also differentiate according to the nature of the job they perform and the area in which they work (front office, back office and support roles). Therefore, the researcher restricted the context of this study to include relatively similar organisations within the same sector (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013).

The researcher is also aware of non-response bias from similar organisations, in the same sector, which declined access to this study. Organisations declined on

grounds of being in a recovery stage following the implementation of extensive restructuring strategies.

The target population included permanent employees over the age of 30 who are employed in the three Irish investment banks and who have completed three or more years' service within the same organisation. This study excluded fixed term contract and seconded employees, as their job tenure would be shorter compared to full time employees. As a result, these employees would have been exposed to a recurrent increase in different tasks, project work and working for different companies over a shorter time frame. As the researcher decided to make a judgement about who to include in this study, a judgemental (or purposive) non-probability sampling technique was used (Quinlan, 2011).

3.5   Research methodology

Research studies are designed either to answer a specific question or address a specific problem (Saunders and Tosey, 2012/2013). This study has adopted Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) metaphor of the "Research Onion" (see Appendix 2) as a guideline to address the four major research objectives.

3.5.1   Research philosophy

A research philosophy can be a general idea or belief a researcher wishes to convey in a study when collecting, interpreting and analysing collected data (Saunders *et al.,* 2007). This study was developed using a theory of knowledge, the law-like generalisation, which is reflecting the research philosophy of positivism (Saunders and Tosey, 2012/2013). According to Quinlan (2011) positivism embraces the use of research methods of social science as having one objective reality (Commonwealth of Learning, 2004). Positivism also believes that

there are universal truths and that the research goals should discover if they are related to each other (Horn, 2009). In view of this, a number of quantitative data and statistical hypotheses will be tested in this study.

3.5.2 Methodical choice

A mono method (quantitative) approach was used in this study whereby it follows one data collection technique. Notwithstanding, the quantitative approach included both open and closed-ended questions. A similar study conducted by McCleese *et al*. (2007) also followed this approach as it provided a comprehensive understanding of career plateau and was appropriate for asking different research questions.

3.5.3 Research approach

Deductive reasoning is the journey of deriving at a logical conclusion about a particular instance, starting with a theory and then focusing down to a very specific hypothesis from general statements (Horn, 2009). Previous studies carried out by Jung and Tak (2009), Burke and Mikkelsen (2006), Lee (2003), Nachbagauer and Riedl (2002) also followed this approach to measure career plateau and to gain a deeper understanding on the negative consequences it leads to. As indicated in the previous chapter, hypotheses were proposed for this study.

The list of hypotheses:

H1:   The impact of subjective measurements will account for more variance than objective measurements when compared to job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions.

H2a: The impact of lack of challenges (job content plateau) and lack of promotions (structural plateau) will be negatively related to job satisfaction.

H2b: The impact of lack of challenges (job content plateau) and lack of promotions (structural plateau) will be negatively related to career satisfaction.

H3: The impact of professional plateau will be negatively related to career satisfaction and job satisfaction, and positively related to turnover intentions.

H4: Structural, job content and double plateau will be positively related to turnover intentions.

3.5.4 Research design

This study followed a descriptive research design, which describes a particular population by looking at a diverse set of variables. Therefore, employees over the age of 30 with three or more years' service working in three multinational investment banks in Ireland, were considered to participate in this study due to career stagnation, as a result of the financial crisis and the aftermath of changing strategies. Employees were contacted in work via an email sent out by their HR department requesting them to complete the online questionnaire. These measurements will form a basis to determine if professionals in the IFS experience a career plateau and what the negative work attitudes might relate to.

3.5.5 Research strategy

As this research study was quantitative, with a deductive approach, the research study was developed using a survey strategy. The survey strategy allowed the standardised quantitative data to be collected for analysis in a structured format from a sizeable number of participants (Saunders and Tosey, 2012/2013).

The first objective was to determine if the career plateau concept is present in the three investment banks and to ascertain whether there is a relationship between career plateau and the three work attitudes. The main articles examined

(Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010; Jung and Tak, 2009; Lee, 2003) maintained that questionnaires yield the most responses. In addition, McCleese *et al*. (2007) stated that a questionnaire is an excellent research strategy to identify the prevalence of career plateau and measuring the specific variables. The second objective of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding on what plateaued employees use in order to deal with a career plateau. This was done by adding two open-ended questions to the questionnaire to explore a range of coping strategies associated with lack of promotions and challenges.

3.5.6   Time horizon

The time horizon refers to planning a specific research study from start to finish. A few studies have suggested in their limitations that a longitudinal study might be more beneficial when measuring career plateau as it will allow to create an infer causal relationship between independent and dependent variables (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006; Lee, 2003). However, as the research aims to take a "snapshot" of the phenomenon over a particular period of time and due to time constraints, a cross-sectional study was adopted (Saunders *et al*., 2007).

3.5.7   Research technique and procedure

The data collection and data analysis are the two most important elements in a research study. According to Quinlan (2011) the distinction between primary and secondary sources are not always observable. However, primary sources provide new insight into any phenomenon, whereas secondary sources do not provide original evidence. The research procedure pursued in this study involves the following five stages.

Stage one: Reviewing materials

The researcher collected secondary data by reviewing a number of performance appraisals of professionals working in the IFS, which highlighted that the career

plateau effect can be a relevant and a major issue for organisations and plateaued employees. The negative comments highlighted in the performance appraisals have been compared to the literature of career plateau.

Stage two: Preliminary meetings with HR professionals

The researcher met with three HR Managers at each of their Dublin offices in February 2014 to ensure the basic assumptions of this study and gain approval to undertake this research in their organisations.

Stage three: Pilot study

A pilot study is a pre-test of the data gathering instrument that is designed for a research study (Quinlan, 2011). In May 2014, nine respondents were identified by having conversations with them based on their experience with a career plateau. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that the questions in the survey were clear (valid) and they gave the responses required (reliability). A Cronbach's alpha was also measured on the key variables to test the internal consistency on the responses from the pilot study. A few amendments were made to the questionnaire where the alpha score was below the acceptable value ranging from 0.70 to 0.95 (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011).

Stage four: Questionnaire administration and procedure

The career plateau survey was administered during the month of June 2014 to three investment banks based in the IFSC. The HR Managers ran a demographic report of all their employees and narrowed the search down to only include employees who are over 30 years of age with more than three years' service within the organisation. Secondly, recipients who met the demographic criteria received an email from their HR department about participating in this study (see Appendix 3). Thirdly, the solicitation email deliberately did not provide potential participants with a brief description of career plateau as it might influence their understanding

of the phenomenon and impact their responses to the study. If they chose to participate in this study they had to click on a link in the email, which directed them to the survey on Google Drive. Before beginning the survey, respondents were provided with a brief outline of the purpose of the study, overview of confidentiality issues, their participation to this study and the instructions on how to complete the survey.

Stage five: Survey feedback

Data analysis is also imperative in the completion of the research (Saunders *et al*., 2007). In this study, numerical data was analysed by using statistical methods. The software packages, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Prism have been used to code each individual's response to the closed-ended questions. The numerical numbers were loaded from a spreadsheet into the software packages for statistical analysis. The results were presented using the following analysis, where it was deemed appropriate:

- Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*).
- Hierarchical multiple regression was used to make a stronger causal inferences and to predict the relationships between dependent and independent variables.
- Pearson correlation (*r*) was used to test the strength of the linear relationship between the key variables.
- Where appropriate, a comparison of categorical data distributions by the D'Agostino–Pearson omnibus methods to test continuous data for normality of distribution was performed. The groups (plateaued and non-plateaued employees) were compared by t-test when normally distributed or by the nonparametric Mann–Whitney U test. A value of $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Responses from the two open-ended questions were analysed in Microsoft Excel by creating code categories to each response. Firstly, a syntactical unit focus (words use) was employed as a formal tool (Horn, 2009) to reveal any themes that emerged from participants' responses. Secondly, similar responses that came up more than once were grouped as a general coping strategy. This approach was used by McCleese *et al*. (2007) as it allows for a higher level of analysis (Horn, 2009) and an in-depth understanding from plateaued employees on how to deal with this concept.

3.6   Data collection methods

3.6.1   Participants
Approximately 95 surveys were sent out in total to the three investment banks in Ireland, 15 responses were rejected on two grounds; participants had less than three years' service and some were in their twenties. Therefore, there were 56 (59%) valid respondents to this survey.

3.6.2   Measures
The survey was completed online on the key variables in this study. The key variables were grouped into dependent and independent variables. A dependent variable is trying to explain or predict the result factor. This study used job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions as dependent variables. The independent variable referred to factors that could influence the dependent variable. In this study, the independent variables were structural plateau, job content plateau, double plateau and professional plateau.

The questionnaire consisted of six sections and contained a total of 60 closed-ended questions (quantitative analysis on a Likert-type scale) and two open-ended

questions (content analysis). The closed-ended questions tested the different types of career plateaus and work attitudes whereas open-ended questions tested the coping strategies to career plateau. The survey also varied the positive and negative questions to keep the respondents interested and maintain their attention as suggested by Horn (2009). A copy of the questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix 4.

Closed-ended questions

Career plateau. The presence of structural plateau and job content plateau were based on McCleese *et al*. (2007) version of career plateau. Both plateauing measures were assessed on a six-item scale and used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A high score on both of these measures would indicate greater indication of being plateaued. A high score on both structural and job content plateau meant that the employee would experience a double plateau. The reported Cronbach's alpha by McCleese *et al*. (2007) for structural plateau was $\alpha = .91$ and job content plateau was $\alpha = .85$. The reported Cronbach's alphas for this study were less than .60, which meant that the internal consistence for both structural plateau ($\alpha = .12$) and job content plateau ($\alpha = .58$) were poor. This could be due to either the low number of questions for each variable or the small sample size used in this study.

Professional plateau. Professional plateau was assessed on a three-item scale from Lee (2003). A high score would reflect a greater experience of professional plateau. The reported Cronbach's alpha by Lee (2003) for professional plateau was $\alpha = .86$. The reported Cronbach's alpha for this study was $\alpha = .73$ which was an acceptable value for alpha.

Career satisfaction. The presence of career satisfaction was developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990) and evaluated by a five-item scale. This measurement was based on a five-point Likert scale. These items were also used in studies by Yean and Yahya (2013) and Wickramsinghe and Jayaweera (2010). In these studies a consistently high reliability result of $\alpha = .88$ was reported. The Cronbach's alpha for this study was $\alpha = .89$ indicated an excellent reliability score.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured based on the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) designed by Spector (1997). It is a 36-item scale measuring nine sub domains such as pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, co-workers, nature of work and communication. Each sub domain was assessed on a four-item scale and used a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). This scale had 19-items that were negatively worded which meant that these reverse coded items were recorded prior to analysis (Watson, Thompson and Meade, 2007). The items used in each measure are listed in Appendix 5. The reported Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .88$ which is deemed reliable.

Turnover intentions. The intention to leave measurement was based on Emberland and Rundmo (2010) version. It is based on four-item scale and used a five-point Likert scale. The reported Cronbach's alpha for this study was $\alpha = .91$ indicated a satisfactory reliability score.

Open-ended questions
There were two open-ended questions in this study based on McCleese *et al*. (2007) version, which asked participants to describe what specific action or strategies they have used to overcome lack of promotions (structure plateau) and lack of challenges in their role (job content plateau).

For structural plateau coping strategy, the instruction was as follows:

> *If applicable, please list all ways you have tried or are actually trying to cope or deal with lack of promotions in your organisation. This can include things you have done at work as well as off the job to cope.*

For job content plateau, the same instruction was provided as above but the wording was adjusted to accommodate the variable:

> *If applicable, please list all ways you have tried or are actually trying to cope or deal with lack of challenges and responsibilities in your organisation. This can include things you have done at work as well as off the job to cope.*

Demographic and profile questions

Demographic data was obtained from participants to assist the study to determine the objective measurements (age, gender, job tenure, last promotion received) of career plateau.

3.6.3   Validating data

Data gathered from the questionnaires were validated 'visually' first before editing the responses to ensure all questions were answered, demographic data was completed and open-ended questions were appropriate.

3.7   Issues of validity and reliability

A measurement of the validity of the research is the degree whereby the researcher is clear about the information required, measure what is set out to measure and design a questionnaire around these guidelines (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore, every question in the questionnaire was relevant to the study and to ensure consistency,

data gathering instruments were validated and employed by other researchers. Reliability is the extent to which data collection techniques will yield consistent findings should they be repeated on another juncture (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). This study confirmed that professional plateau, career satisfaction, job satisfaction and turnover intentions all have a relatively high Cronbach's alpha measurement whereas structural plateau and job content plateau measurements seemed to be unreliable.

3.8   Triangulation

According to Saunders *et al.* (2007) triangulation is the process whereby different data collection techniques such as a questionnaire and interviews are used in one study. The only data collection technique used in this study was a survey strategy. Therefore, there was no triangulation associated within this study.

3.9   Ethical issues

This study aimed to conduct research on participants who were working in the IFS by completing the online questionnaire. Although this study used a survey research design, which is less complex or harmful to participants, it is important for the participants to be fully aware of the basic principles for protecting them, including disclosure of data and consent to use it. Also, the researcher was open and honest with the participants about the nature of the research. For example in this study, participants were approached by email in work, covering the details of the research study to ensure that they are fully aware of the purpose of this study. The participant demographics were also clearly highlighted in the email namely working in the IFS and were over the age of 30 with more than three years' in their

respective company. Information generated from the survey was anonymous (free from identification) and confidential. Confidential is the act of non-disclosure of certain information (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore, the data gathered will remain anonymous and the three investment banks will not be identified. The findings of this study will be used only for the purpose of completing this dissertation therefore the researcher was the only person who had access to the data. There was no risk of harm or distress to the participants during this study.

3.10   Limitations

The limitations associated with this study were to gain access from HR professionals to undertake a research study in their organisation. HR professionals felt that they have been working hard at retaining key talent over the past few years and do not want their employees to participate in this survey as they consider career plateau to be a negative concept. Also, HR professionals did not feel comfortable to circulate the survey to employees for participation.

3.11   Conclusion

This study followed a philosophy of positivism by incorporating a mono-method approach. A survey strategy was used due to the time constraints by sending out an online self-administered questionnaire to a selected number of employees in the IFS.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

The four main segments that will be addressed in this chapter will be to report on the demographic data of participants, findings and results of the quantitative data collected and to discuss those findings in detail. The variables were scored as per instructions of previous researchers. The data were tabulated on Microsoft Excel and used SPSS and Prism for all statistical analysis. The survey findings will be analysed and presented by key variables, as highlighted in the six sections of the questionnaire:

Sections in questionnaire	Key variables	Abbreviations used in this chapter
Independent variables		
Demographic data on participants	Age, gender, job tenure, last promotion etc.	
Your future opportunities in your current company	Structural plateau	(SP)
	Job content plateau	(JCP)
	Double plateau	(DP)
	Professional plateau	(PP)
Dependent variables		
How satisfied are you with your career	Career satisfaction	(CS)
How satisfied are you with your current role	Job satisfaction	(JS)
How do you feel about your current organisation and job	Turnover intentions	(TI)
Your coping strategies to career plateau	Open-ended questions	

4.2   Demographic data of participants

Seven questions on demographics were addressed at the end of the questionnaire and included items such as gender, age and last promotion received. Data, in the form of a survey, was collected from 71 respondents. Fifteen of the surveys did not form a good analysis. Overall, from the 56 respondents used in this study, 54% were male and 46% female (Figure 1). The majority of the population (75%) was between 30-39 years of age, followed by 20% between 40-49 years and only 5% who are over 50 years of age (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Gender of participants
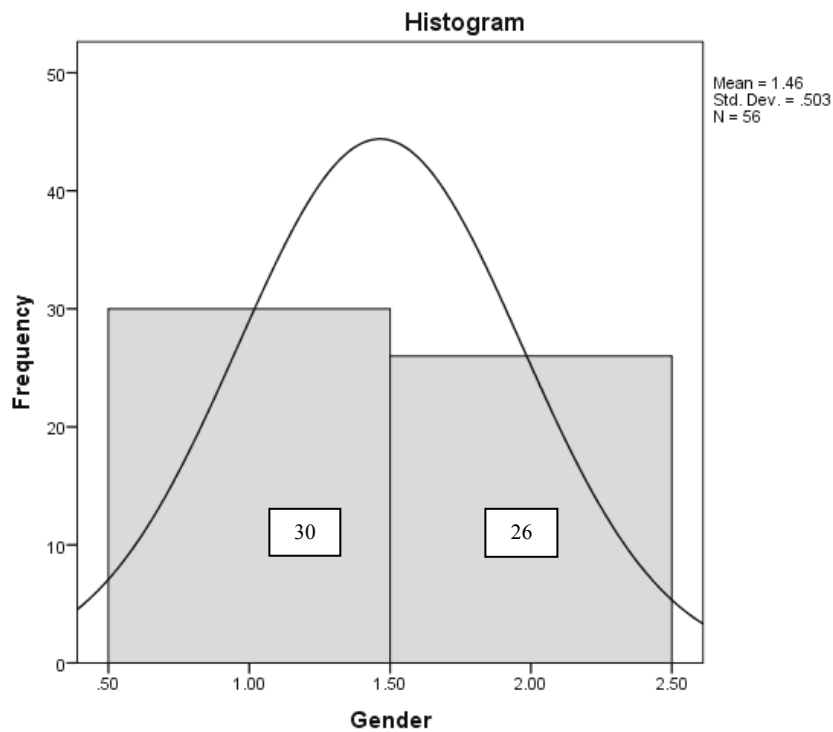
Figure 2: Age of population
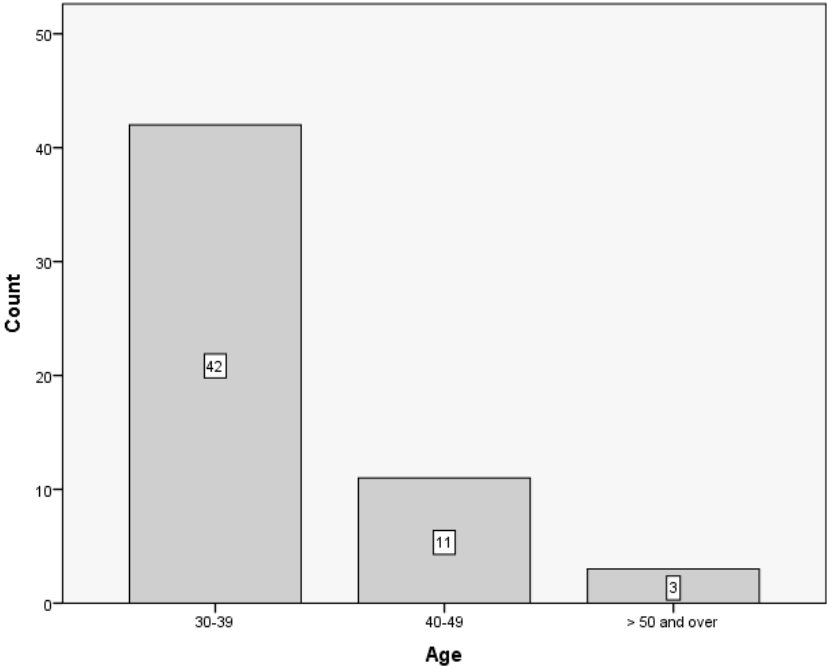
In Figure 3, the total number of years working in the same organisation are shown using a scatterplot, the minimum number of years among participants were three years and maximum was 24 years.

Figure 3: Time in service (years)
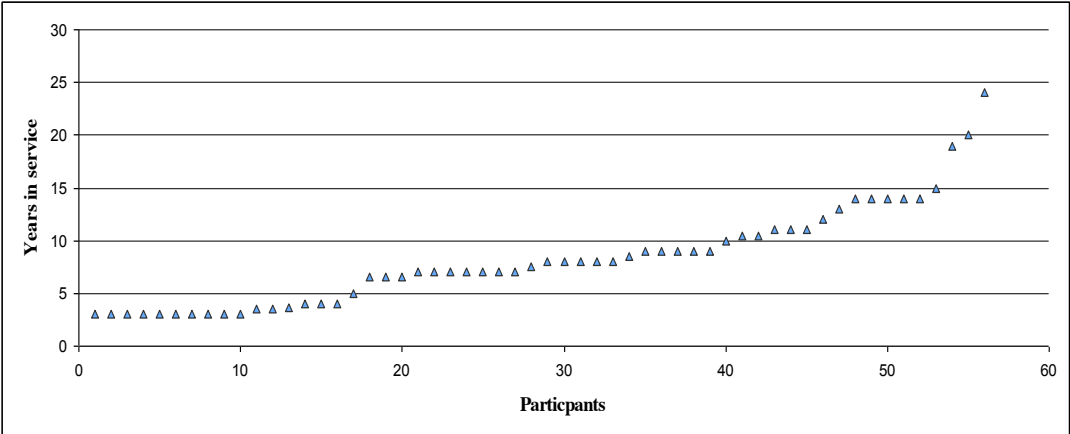
The time lapsed between promotions was measured based on an employee's last promotion received within their current organisation. It is clear from the pie chart (Figure 4) that 52% of the respondents' last promotion were greater than three years, 27% never had a promotion while working in the same organisation. Whilst, 9% received a promotion less than a year ago followed by 12% who received it between one and two years.

Figure 4: Approximately how long ago was your last promotion

Promotion
- Never
- Less than a year ago
- 1-2 years ago
- 3 years and over

26.79%

51.79%

8.93%

12.50%
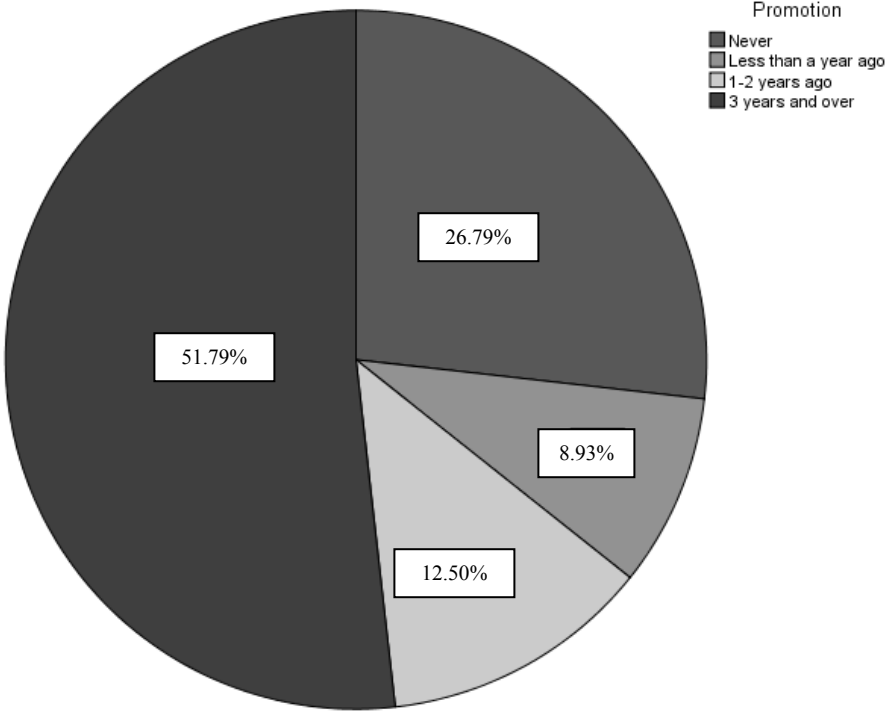
A summary list of the sample date demographics are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample data demographics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age group 1=30-39 2=40-49 3=> than 50	56	1	3	1.3	0.57
Job grade	56	1	6	2.82	1.32
Time in service (years)	56	3	24	8.38	4.95
Time since last promotion 1=Never 2=< than year 3=1-2 years 4=> than 3 years	56	1	4	2.89	1.30
Job tenure (years)	56	1	22	4.53	3.76
Education	56	1	6	3.18	1.43

4.3   Findings

In Table 2, a Pearson product-movement correlation and the Sig. (2-tailed) test matrix were computed first to assess the strength of the linear relationship between the key dependent and independent variables used in this study. This table will be used as a reference throughout the findings section.

Table 2: Pearson correlation and Sig. (2-tailed) on dependent and independent variables

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
							Correlations						
1. SP	Pearson Correlation	1	.516**	.842**	-.211	-.174	-.126	.469**	-.032	.074	.042	.109	.229
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000***	.000***	.118	.199	.355	.000***	.816	.586	.760	.422	.090
2. JCP	Pearson Correlation	.516**	1	.896**	-.101	-.176	-.060	.230	.095	.195	.402**	.097	.235
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000***		.000***	.458	.194	.661	.089	.485	.149	.002	.478	.082
3. DP	Pearson Correlation	.842**	.896**	1	-.173	-.176	-.103	.387**	.043	.161	.275*	.117	.232
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000***	.000***		.202	.195	.450	.003	.751	.235	.040	.389	.085
4. PP	Pearson Correlation	-.211	-.101	-.173	1	.332*	.271*	-.328*	.241	.088	-.039	.046	-.186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.118	.458	.202		.012	.043	.014	.074	.519	.774	.737	.169
5. JS	Pearson Correlation	-.174	-.176	-.176	.332*	1	.284*	-.318*	.337*	.091	-.062	-.142	-.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.199	.194	.195	.012		.034	.017	.011	.507	.652	.295	.278
6. CS	Pearson Correlation	-.126	-.060	-.103	.271*	.284*	1	-.061	-.063	-.181	-.206	.012	-.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.355	.661	.450	.043	.034		.656	.642	.182	.127	.928	.726
7. TI	Pearson Correlation	.469**	.230	.387**	-.328*	-.318*	-.061	1	-.425**	-.289*	.028	-.115	.167
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000***	.089	.003	.014	.017	.656		.001	.031	.837	.400	.217
8. Age	Pearson Correlation	-.032	.095	.043	.241	.337*	-.063	-.425**	1	.646**	.280*	.167	.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.816	.485	.751	.074	.011	.642	.001		.000***	.036	.218	.607
9. Time in service	Pearson Correlation	.074	.195	.161	.088	.091	-.181	-.289*	.646**	1	.478**	.454**	-.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.586	.149	.235	.519	.507	.182	.031	.000***		.000***	.000***	.735
10. Job tenure	Pearson Correlation	.042	.402**	.275*	-.039	-.062	-.206	.028	.280*	.478**	1	.164	-.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.760	.002	.040	.774	.652	.127	.837	.036	.000***		.226	.684

11. Last promotion	Pearson Correlation	.109	.097	.117	.046	-.142	.012	-.115	.167	**.454****	.164	1	.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.422	.478	.389	.737	.295	.928	.400	.218	.000***	.226		.571
12. Gender	Pearson Correlation	.229	.235	.232	-.186	-.148	-.048	.167	.070	-.046	-.056	.077	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.090	.082	.085	.169	.278	.726	.217	.607	.735	.684	.571	

***. Correlation is significant at the $p<0.0001$ (represented as 0.000)

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

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

N = 56

4.3.1   Your future opportunities in your current company

The purpose of this section was to determine if employees in the IFS are currently experiencing some sort of career plateau and if this is due to lack of promotions, lack of challenges in their role or both. Overall, 50% reported to experience some type of career plateau.

Among these responses, who indicated that they are at a plateau stage (Figure 5), 78% reported to plateaued due to lack of promotional opportunities (SP) in their organisation, 52% plateaued professionally (PP), 48% experience both types (DP), followed by 21% plateaued due to lack of challenges (JCP).

Figure 5: Types of career plateau present in IFS
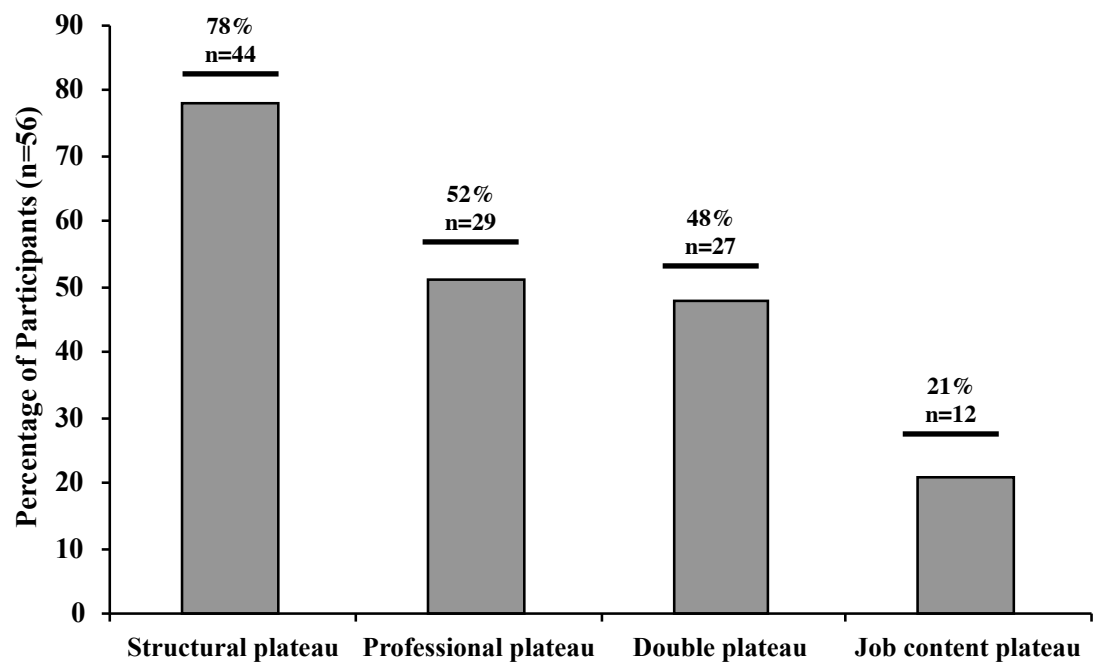
Typologies of Career Plateau

Structural plateau

Those with a scale average of four or above on SP indicated a strong agreement with the six questions on lack of promotions in their organisation (McCleese *et al*., 2007). The measure of central tendency was calculated to interpret the variability of the scores for SP. Table 3 provided the average responses on analysis of SP.

The highest mean score was 4 on the first three questions as employees agreed with these statements, apart from the second last question relating to future career progression in the same organisation where the mean was 2.178 indicating that most employees disagreed with this statement.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of SP

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
My opportunities for upward movement are limited in my present organisation	56	2.00	5.00	4.6071	.82415
I have reached a point where I do not expect to move much higher in my organisation	56	1.00	5.00	4.2679	1.05298
The likelihood that I will get ahead in my organisation is limited	56	1.00	5.00	4.3214	.95550
I am likely to obtain a much higher job title in my organisation	56	2.00	5.00	3.3036	1.07736
I expect to advance to a higher level in the near future in my organisation	56	1.00	5.00	2.1786	1.25201
I would take a lateral move if it involved interesting work or required new skills	56	1.00	5.00	3.9286	.95073
Valid N (listwise)	56				

Where: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Job content plateau

Analogous to SP coding, a scale average of four or above on JCP indicated a strong agreement with the six questions on lack of challenges in their jobs. On these set of questions, the 56 respondents had an average mean score of 2.734 (*SD* = 1.129) indicating that the employees disagreed with 83% of the statements, suggesting that they are predicting their job responsibilities to increase in the future which will allow them to learn and grow (Table 4).

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of JCP

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
I expect to be constantly challenged in my job in the future	56	1.00	5.00	2.9821	1.27195
My current job tasks and activities will not become routine for me in the future	56	1.00	5.00	3.5000	1.06173
I will not continue to learn and grow a lot in my current job	56	1.00	5.00	2.6429	1.08592
My current job responsibilities will not increase significantly in the future	56	1.00	5.00	2.1429	1.21249
I will be challenged in my current job	56	1.00	5.00	2.6071	1.13904
My current job will not continually require me to develop my abilities and knowledge	56	1.00	4.00	2.5357	1.00841
Valid N (listwise)	56				

Where: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Double plateau

DP was coded on the basis that employees scored an average of four or above on both SP and JCP. For the 56 respondents, DP was strongly and significantly correlated (see Table 2) with SP ($r = .842$, $p = .0001$) and JCP ($r = .896$, $p = .0001$). Thus, there was a strong relationship between the variables which indicated that as one variable increase in value so does the second variable.

Professional plateau

Those with a scale average of four and above delivered a greater experience of this type of plateau (Lee, 2003). The mean value in Table 5 provided the average responses on PP. In most cases the highest mean score was 3 which suggested the employees were not sure about these statements.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of PP

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
My job provides opportunities for me to keep up to date in my profession	56	1.00	5.00	3.5357	1.00841
My job is challenging	56	1.00	5.00	3.0536	1.13490
I am learning new things on my job that would enhance my professional standing	56	1.00	5.00	3.3571	1.11890
Valid N (listwise)	56				

Where: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

4.3.2   How satisfied are you with your career

These sets of questions were included to understand if employees are satisfied with their success and progress towards meeting their career goals. The mean value in Table 6 provides the average CS levels of participants. All five questions of CS obtained an average mean value among participants of 3.399, which meant that they do not have a positive or negative experience with this concept.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of CS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career	56	1.00	5.00	3.5000	1.02691
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals	56	1.00	5.00	3.4821	1.09530
I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income	56	1.00	5.00	3.3214	1.16162
I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement	56	1.00	5.00	3.3036	1.11060
I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills	56	1.00	5.00	3.3929	.98495
Valid N (listwise)	56				

Where: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

The Pearson product-movement correlation in Table 2, was conducted to assess the relationship between PP (M = 3.315 and SD = .879) and CS (M = 3.400 and SD = .905). As there was a weak relationship (R linear value of .073) between the two variables, it had a positive correlation (r = .271, p = .043). The unstandardised coefficients B in the linear regression equation shows that the relationship between PP and CS is .279. Therefore, if PP goes up by 1, CS is predicted to go up by .279 (see Appendix 6).

4.3.3   How satisfied are you with your current role

JSS was assessed on a continuum from 1 (disagree very much) to 6 (agree very much). After the reverse scoring of the negatively worded items was performed, an absolute approach was used to distinguish between dissatisfied and satisfied employees (Spector, 1997). This process was carried out by firstly calculating the sum of the nine sub domains individually and secondly by distinguishing between the three groups from the four-item scales. The three groups were classified on a range from 4-12 which was considered to be dissatisfied, 12-16 was ambivalent and 16-24 was satisfied.

In Figure 6, it is evident that, 73% of the respondents are dissatisfied with promotional opportunities, followed by 38% with communication channels in their organisation and 34% stated that they are dissatisfied with their pay. Whereas 80% are satisfied with support from their supervisor followed by 73% with their co-workers and fringe benefits with 61% when compared to what other organisations offer. Overall, 2% are dissatisfied, 32% are satisfied and 66% are ambivalent. There was a positive correlation between JS and PP (r = .332, p = .012).

Figure 6: Important factors of job satisfaction
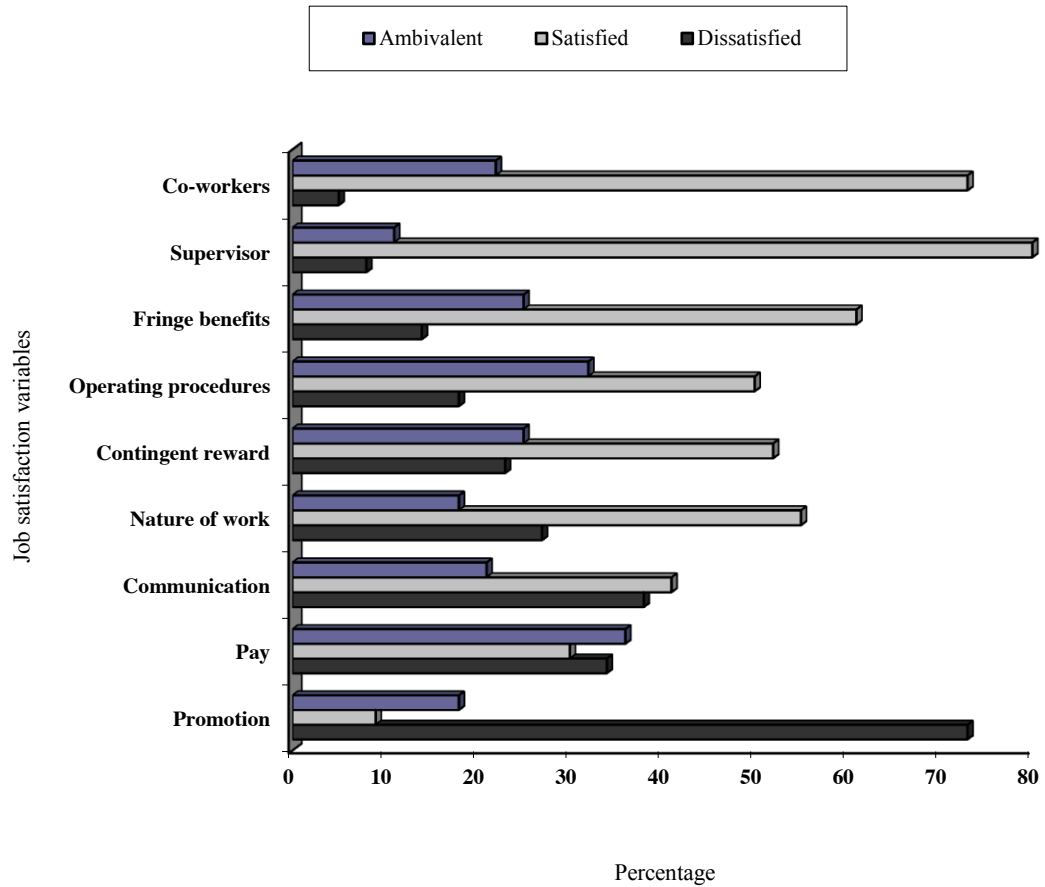
4.3.4   How do you feel about your current organisation and job

These sets of questions were posed to discover if the four career plateau typologies positively relates to TI. The mean value in Table 7, provided the average responses on TI levels of participants. The highest mean score was 4 as most employees agreed with the last statement "I will probably not stay at the same workplace until I reach retirement". In most case the mean score was above 3.6 indicating that they somewhat agree with the statements.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of TI

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
I often think about applying for a job somewhere else	56	1.00	5.00	3.9107	1.17978
If I had different alternatives I would probably not work in the same organisation as now	56	1.00	5.00	3.8036	1.19726
After all I have been through it, is not going to take much before I apply for a job somewhere else	56	1.00	5.00	3.6964	1.23465
I will probably not stay at the same workplace until I reach retirement	55	1.00	5.00	4.3091	1.08649
Valid N (listwise)	55				

Where: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Undecided; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

As per the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient in Table 2, it was assessed that TI had a weak, positive correlation with SP ($r = .469$, $p = .0001$), DP ($r = .387$, $p = .003$) and a negative correlation with PP ($r = -.328$, $p = .014$). However, as PP had a weak, negative correlation with TI it meant that as PP increases, TI would decrease.

A scatterplot summarises the results for SP in Figure 7 and also includes the R^2 linear value, whereby 22% of the variability in TI is associated with SP. The scatterplot for the other three career plateau typologies on TI had a weak R linear value (DP = 15%, PP = 10% and JCP = 5%) and therefore were omitted. TI did not correlate with JCP in this study.

Figure 7: Scatterplot for SP and TI
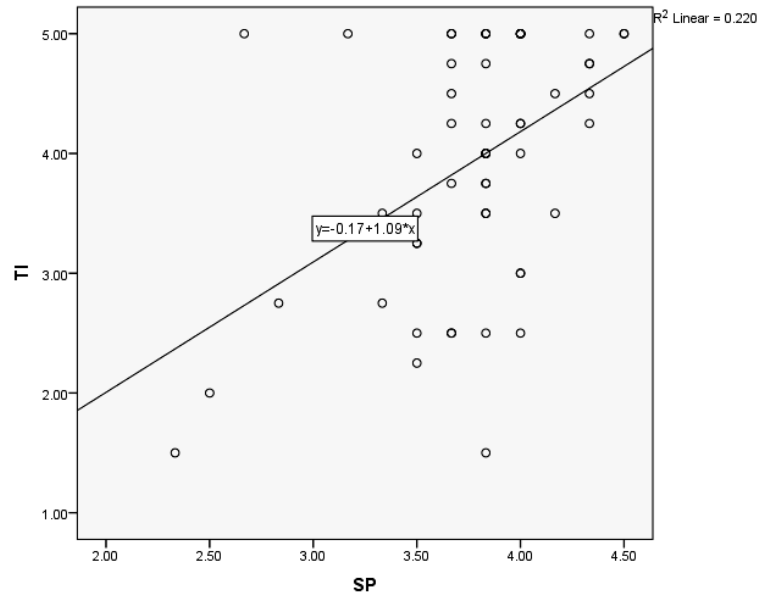
Subsequently, a statistical analysis was carried between employees who were SP, JCP, DP and PP compared with non-plateaued employees according to their responses on the five-point Likert scale for TI. In Figure 8, a significantly higher mean on the Likert scale was observed for SP employees ($M = 4.182$, $SD = 0.902$, $N = 44$) compared with employees who were not designated as SP ($M = 3.021$, $SD = 0.944$, $N = 12$, $p = 0.0005$).

Figure 8: Mann-Whitney test for TI on SP
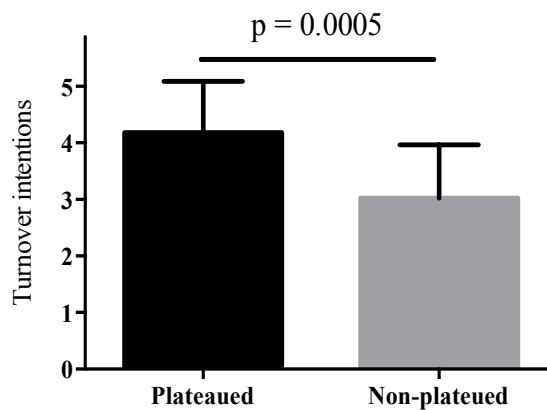
This association of TI was also observed with DP employees in Figure 9 (M = 3.830, SD = 0.226, N = 27) and was significantly higher when compared to the non-DP group (M = 3.221, SD = 0.352, N = 29, p < 0.0001).

Figure 9: Mann-Whitney test for TI on DP
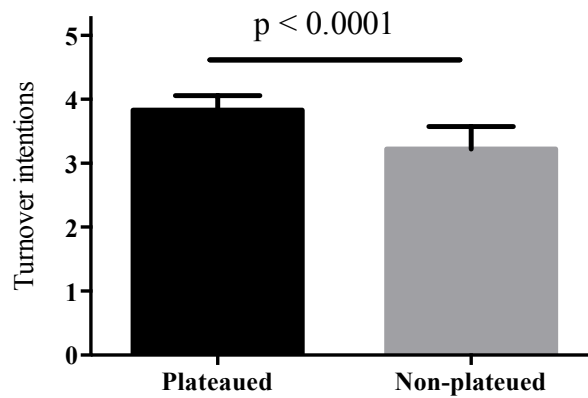
In Figure 10, the same trend was observed concerning PP employees who had a higher TI when compared with non-PP group (M = 4.224, SD = 0.856, N = 29 and M = 3.62, SD = 1.108, N = 27 respectively, p = 0.0259).

Figure 10: T-test for TI on PP
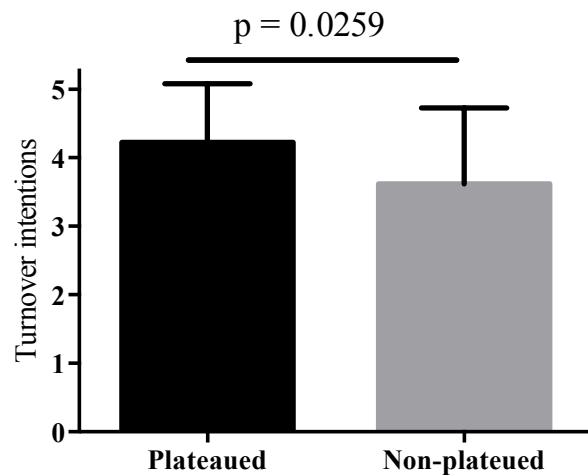
However, in Figure 11, the high Likert scale was higher in JCP employees (M = 4.000, SD = 0.275, N = 12) when compared with non-JCP employees (M = 3.057, SD = .392, N = 44, p < .0001).

Figure 11: Mann-Whitney test for TI on JCP
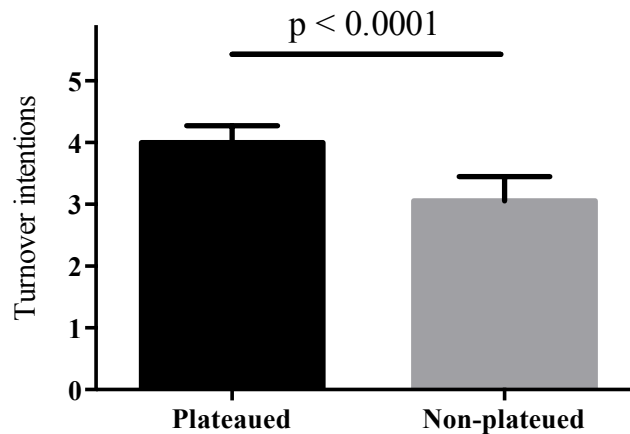
The next step was to use hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between TI and the independent variables (objective and subjective measurements) in order to test the effects of the predictors independently from each other. The independent variables were entered separately into two stages and referred to as models.

Model 1 refers to the first stage when the predictor variables (objective measurements) namely last promotion, job tenure, age and time in service were entered in, as empirical literature provides evidence that these variables expect to predict career plateau. Model 2 refers to the final stage when the exploratory predictor variables (subjective measurements) namely SP, JCP and DP were entered in to examine the relationship with Model 1. This step was repeated three separate times to include all three subjective measurements of career

plateau as the exploratory predictor variable. The results of the regression for TI met the criteria of low multicollinearity (VIF of less than 1.8).

Therefore, Table 8a illustrates the model summary, which contained SP as the exploratory predictor variable. In Model 1, the objective predictor model was statistically significant $F (4, 51) = 3.441$, $p = .015$ and accounted for 21.3% of the variance TI ($R^2 = .213$, Adjust $R^2 = .151$). When SP was entered into the regression equations (Model 2), the change in the R^2 went up from 21.3% to 42.8% and had a R^2 change value of 21.6%. Therefore, SP accounted for 21.6% increase in predictive capacity of the variances in TI and was statistically significant $F(1, 50) = 18.839$, $p < .001$, which concludes that any changes that resulted from SP was not due to change alone.

Table 8a: SP as the exploratory predictor variable

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.461ᵃ	.213	.151	.94276	.213	3.441	4	51	.015
2	.654ᵇ	.428	.371	.81146	.216	18.839	1	50	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Last promotion, Job tenure, Age, Time in service

b. Predictors: (Constant), Last promotion, Job tenure, Age, Time in service, SP

In Table 8b, the only variable that was associated with a statistically significant beta weights, in Model 1, was age with a standardised beta weight of .406, a *t* value of -2.446. In Model 2, SP received the strongest weight in the model (standardised beta weight of .469, a *t* value of 4.340) followed by age.

Table 8b: Model parameters on SP

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.894	.413		11.847	.000
	Age	-.729	.298	-.406	-2.446	**.018**
	Time in service	-.022	.041	-.108	-.541	.591
	Job tenure	.054	.039	.198	1.397	.169
	Last promotion	-.024	.112	-.030	-.214	.831
2	(Constant)	.837	1.000		.837	.406
	Age	-.628	.257	-.349	-2.438	.018
	Time in service	-.033	.036	-.161	-.934	.355
	Job tenure	.053	.033	.194	1.589	.118
	Last promotion	-.052	.096	-.067	-.542	.590
	SP	1.088	.251	.469	4.340	**.000**

a. Dependent Variable: TI

When JCP was added to Model 2, in the model summary (see Appendix 7), it was not statistically significant $F (1, 50) = 3.672$, $p = .061$.

Lastly, DP was added to Model 2 (see Appendix 8). The change in the R went up from 21.3% to 36.3% and had a R^2 change value of 15%. DP accounted for 15% increase in predictive capacity of the variances in TI and was statistically significant $F (1, 50) = 11.830$, $p = .001$. DP had a standardised beta weight of .406 and a t value of 3.44.

4.3.5   Your coping strategies to career plateau

Research objective four seeks to understand the coping strategies employees use to overcome the lack of promotions (SP) and lack of challenges (JCP) in their organisation. It also looks at what plateaued employees do outside work to cope with a career plateau. A list of all the coping strategies is reported in Table 9, showing the frequency of its occurrence, the percentage of responses by each strategy and a list of sample responses to all the coping strategies.

Responses resulted in 16 major themes, which were categorised into five meta-themes. Overall, the most frequently reported coping strategy meta-themes were job involvement (44.6%), job withdrawal (16.1%), non-work activities (12.6%), while mental coping (7.1%) and discuss problem (1.8%) were the least frequently reported. As the open-ended questions were optional, 17.9% reported nothing and does not form part of the meta-themes.

Table 9: Coping strategy frequency, percentages and sample responses

Meta-themes	Overall %	Sample responses
Job involvement	**25 (44.6%)**	
Education	12 (21.4%)	*"Completed a degree in Financial Service."*
Increase job knowledge	6 (10.7%)	*"Getting involved in projects which is beyond my pay scale."*
Increase workload	4 (7.1%)	*"I took on additional tasks in my role in an attempt to deal with lack of challenges."*
External professional events	2 (3.6%)	*"Always getting involved in new projects, speaking at and going to external professional events where possible."*
Change department	1 (1.8%)	*"In my job I requested a change of department on a number of occasions."*
Nothing	**10 (17.9%)**	
Job withdrawal	**9 (16.1%)**	

Turnover intentions	6 (10.7%)	*"I have engaged all avenues of senior management, I have applied for a higher post and are now actively seeking alternative job opportunities."*
Change / reduce hours	2 (3.6%)	*"Looked at other jobs and realised that most other companies are in a similar situation - this helps me cope. I have pulled back in relation to overtime, starting early and working through my lunch."*
Avoid more responsibility	1 (1.8%)	*"Do only what I have to do as I will not be rewarded for taking on additional work."*
Non-work activities	**7 (12.6%)**	
Leisure activities	2 (3.6%)	*"I engage in personal activities and my interests outside of work - this is the only thing that keeps me going."*
Exercise	2 (3.6%)	*"Sport takes mind of work."*
Work life balance	2 (3.6%)	*"Enjoy work life balance, enjoy life outside work instead."*
Set personal challenges	1 (1.8%)	*"I have set myself challenges outside of the workplace and I am working towards meeting these."*
Mental coping	**4 (7.1%)**	
Positive thinking	2 (3.6%)	*"Go by the principle work to live rather that live to work."*
Counselling	1 (1.8%)	*"Counselling and self-help motivation."*
Stress	1 (1.8%)	*"I have been working outside my present role doing numerous plays gathering experience working with other actors and directors. This also helps to reduce the stress of my current position."*
Discuss problem	**1 (1.8%)**	
Management	1 (1.8%)	*"Brought up my concerns directly within the company."*
Total	**56 (100%)**	

Note: Based on $N = 44$ SP, $N = 12$ JCP, $N = 27$ DP and $N = 29$ PP.

4.4   Hypotheses results

H1, stated that subjective measurements of career plateau (SP and JCP) will account for a significant variance, than objective measurements (age and time in service) when compared to JS, CS and TI. The objective measures namely age and time in service had a significant positive correlation with each other (p = .0001) and both had a statistically significant negative correlation with TI (age, p = .001 and time in service, p = .031). Age also had a positive correlation with JS (p = .011). This hypothesis was not supported, as the subjective measurements of career plateau did not account for a significant variance over objective measurements as only SP and DP correlated with TI (p = .0001 and p = .003 respectively). The results, therefore, show that objective measurements of career plateau provided a stronger explanatory power over work attitudes than subjective measurements.

In order to support H2a and H2b, which stated that individuals experiencing a career plateau (SP and JCP) would report negatively towards both CS and JS. In this study H2a and H2b were not supported; no significant differences were found between CS and JS to career plateau.

H3 stated that PP will be negatively related to CS and JS, and positively related to TI. The results of the analysis do not support H3 as PP correlated positively with JS (p = .012) and CS (p = .043), whereas TI was negatively correlated to PP (p = 0.14).

In order to examine H4, all four career plateau typologies (SP, JCP, DP and PP) had to relate positively to TI. Partially supporting H4, TI had a positive relationship with SP (p = .0001) and DP (p = .003). However, PP had a weak, negative correlation with TI which indicates that as employees gain professional development in an organisation their intention to leave will reduce. JCP did not relate to TI.

4.5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact a career plateau has on Irish professionals, in the context of restructuring investment banks, to three work attitudes (JS, CS and TI) and to explore the coping strategies employees use to deal with a career plateau. This study draws three general conclusions. Firstly, the subjective measurements (SP and JCP) of career plateau failed to capture the negative effects of CS and JS whilst only SP capturing TI as a negative work attitude whereas objective measurements correlated with JS and TI. Secondly, the findings confirmed that TI is one of the major issues employees are considering, followed by CS and JS. Thirdly, employees use a wide scope of coping strategies when faced with lack of promotions and challenges in their job. The implications of the findings are discussed in the sections that follow.

4.5.1 Measuring career plateau

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis shows that objective measurements namely last promotion, job tenure and time in service did not make a significant contribution to TI and correlated with neither of the other two dependent variables. Age is the only objective measurement of career plateau that correlated with the two work attitudes namely JS and TI. Therefore, this study can confirm that career plateau is not only a Baby Boom generation problem but indeed a Generation X issue that needs to be addressed.

JS and CS did not relate with SP and JCP. Explanations to this might be due to the small sample size or employees are aware of the conditions Irish banks are facing today and may have accepted that restricted promotional opportunities are inevitable. This findings also supports the findings of Wickramasinghe and Jayaweers (2010) and Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel (2009) whereby the sample size are highly educated with qualifications and very little hierachal movement is available due to restructruing. Therefore, SP may not determine

an employees' satisfaction within their job (Allen, Poteet and Russell, 1998). A further explanation could be that employees are happy to remain where they are for now until the employment market picks up again. In addition, as the majority of banks have put a freeze on recruitment, finding another job in today's market could be difficult, time consuming and frustrating due to increase in competition. These results show that subjective measurements of career plateau do not provide a strong explanatory prediction for the three work attitudes.

4.5.2   Consequences of career plateau

The overall research objective was to ascertain whether a dysfunctional career plateau could affect work attitudes. The results showed that the four typologies of career plateau do indeed demonstrate a presence among the three work attitudes (JS, CS and TI). The high mean value obtained for SP suggested that employees in IFS are mainly struggling with lack of promotional opportunities in their organisation. Previous studies show that SP has a minimalistic impact on work attitudes when compared to JCP (Armstrong and Ursel, 2009; Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002). However, this study shows that both SP and JCP do not have a significant effect on JS and CS (Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010). In light of this, the relationship between SP and JCP is positive and significant, which supports the suggestion made by Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera (2010) that SP may result in JCP.

The results pertaining to PP demonstrated a significant positive relationship with JS ($r = .332$, $p = .012$) and CS ($r = .271$, $p = .043$) and a negative correlation with TI ($r = -.328$, $p = 0.14$). These results reinforce Lee's (2003) study pertaining that PP adds another dimension to career plateau literature. The explanation to this is that professional development plays a key role in the IFS whilst leading towards positive work attitudes. In this study, PP was the only independent variable that related to all three dependent variables.

This study also shows that TI correlated positively with SP and DP, which is consistent with previous researchers who reported similar findings (Salami, 2010; Armstrong and Ursel, 2009; Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002). The results of the regression analysis demonstrated that SP and DP were statistical significant with TI. This study's findings also ties in with Emberland and Rundmo (2010) study which confirmed that as organisations go through a restructuring phase, employees consciously consider leaving their current employer. Surprisingly, PP had a negative correlation with TI, which suggested that as PP increases TI would decrease. The explanation to this result may be that as employees learn and develop in their organisation they are less inclined to leave their employer.

In contrast to the results of this study, it appears that the four career plateau typologies provide an in depth understanding for TI as an unavoidable concept in the IFS. Here it was observed that individuals who were associated with all of these plateau groups had a higher score on the Likert scale for TI when compared to their counterparts who were not plateaued. This all lends weight to the idea that any type of plateau experienced by an individual can result in them having a higher tendency to leave their current employment.

4.5.3 Coping with a career plateau

Plateaued employees in this study reported the use of 16 distinct coping strategies, which were categorised into five meta-themes. Surprisingly, job involvement score was the highest, with education to be the most sought after strategy among employees in the IFS. This could explain the findings in H2a and H2b. As mentioned in the literature, employees that work in the IFS are always expanding their knowledge and marketability by staying abreast with areas of their professional development to cope with lack of challenges. It is also clear from the findings of PP that employees in the IFS highly value further education and development of new skills.

Job withdrawal coping strategies confirm the findings from previous researchers revealing TI as an outcome to career plateaued (Foster *et al*., 2011; Emberland and Rundmo, 2010; Heilmann *et al*., 2008). It is also clear from the responses that employees will be able to cope better with a career plateau depending on what type of plateau they are experiencing.

Non-work activities namely leisure activities, exercise and work life balance play a key part among employees to cope with a plateau outside working hours. Interestingly, it appears that Irish employees value their health and well-being to reduce the negative impact of career plateau.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1   Introduction

This chapter will draw conclusions from the overall responses to the research questions, discuss and theorise on the findings, highlight the implications of the research and provide recommendations for future research.

5.2   Conclusions

The first question raised in this study was to determine if career plateau is a relevant concept in the three organisations within the IFSC post Celtic Tiger years. The findings from this study sets off some warning signals to organisations that career plateau is not an old-fashioned concept in the IFS. Interestingly, the findings pertaining to professional plateau are found to be the most remarkable in this study correlating with all three work attitudes which corresponds with Lee's (2003) study.

The overall research objective was to determine whether career plateau has a negative effect on the three work attitudes (job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions). This study concluded that turnover intentions related positively to structural plateau and double plateau which highlighted that as the negative symptoms of career plateau increase so will an employees' intention to leave the organisation. This could flag a serious issue for organisations when the employment market starts to pick up again, organisations starts to hire and key talent resigning. In the first two quarters of 2014, there has been a significant upturn in recruitment in the IFS in Dublin. For example, most of the

domestic banks, Allied Irish Bank, Ulster Bank, KBC and Bank of Ireland are hiring; the asset management companies of Cantor Fitzgerald and Pioneer Investments are actively hiring and investment houses such as JP Morgan, State Street and Northern Trust are also actively hiring. Therefore, in order for organisations to retain key talent they will need to address the career plateau concept.

Career satisfaction related positively to professional plateau, which means that as employees expand and uphold their professional development it leads to an increase in career satisfaction. Therefore, it is imperative for organisations to focus on their employees' personal development and encourage them to advance further in their career.

As expected, both structural and job content plateau did not relate to job and career satisfaction. However, empirical research reported that structural plateau and job content plateau are key independent variables for predicting job and career satisfaction in stable organisations. Therefore, this study advances the theory of career plateau, which was set in the context of investment banks in Ireland coming into a recovery stage. This study shows that structural and job content plateau do not appear to be key variables associated with job and career satisfaction. The findings in this study agrees with Allen's *et al*. (1998) study as professionals working in the IFS are mindful of the challenges Irish banks are facing today. They are also conscious that as Irish banks are on the road to recovery and that promotional opportunities may be limited due to older workers delaying their retirement process.

Consequently, career plateau is a concept that develops over time and comes in different forms depending on each employee's circumstances and experiences (Appelbaum and Santiago, 1997). Therefore this study also explores the coping strategies employees use to overcome this concept. It is clear from the research findings that employees in the IFS indicated that job involvement strategies

such as education and gaining new knowledge on the job were the most commonly sought after coping strategies to deal with career plateau. Job withdrawal strategies such as intention to leave and reduction in working hours were the next sought after coping strategies. The rational relating to this negative coping strategy reconfirms employees' responses to the dependent variable of turnover intentions that, if left unmanaged, organisations will face an increase of resignations when the employment market picks up again.

5.3   Limitation of the research

While this study adds considerable insight to the career plateau literature in the three Irish multinational investment banks it is, however, subject to a few limitations. The findings of this research are only valid to three investment banks in the IFSC and therefore the findings have limited generalisability. Another limitation is that 95% of the population was between 30 - 49 years of age and only 5% were over the age of 50. It is also not clear from this study if career plateau is predominately a front office problem or middle office/support role issue; further research could explore this. The research design of this study relied on cross sectional data prohibiting the cause and effect relationship between variables.

5.4   Recommendations for future research

Use of moderators to reduce the negative impact of work attitudes
Recent research on career plateau has led to the belief that the use of moderators can alleviate the negative effects of career plateau and also a step forward in understanding this process in organisations and more importantly among employees (Foster *et al.,* 2011; Tremblay and Roger, 2004; Chay *et al.,* 1995).

Employees in this study showed that they were highly satisfied with their supervisor and co-workers. Notwithstanding, when an employee is treated with respect by his or her supervisor it may increase the employees' job satisfaction (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008), contribute to the employee's performance (Ettington, 1998), significantly influence the employee's career satisfaction (Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2010) and reduce the negative effects of career plateau (Jung and Tak, 2009).

An employee's motivation to come into work each day and perform a range of repetitive tasks can be driven by a number of positive and negative factors, which is referred to as work motivation (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013). The term career motivation embraces work motivation but goes further to associate motivation with career decisions and behaviours (London, 1983). An employee with high levels of career motivation would have realistic career goals and demonstrate higher job satisfaction (Jung and Tak, 2009).

Studying the two moderator variables from both individual and situational perspective will fill a gap in searching for solutions in managing or reducing the negative impact of career plateau. Further research can investigate the effects of perceived supervisor support, as a situational variable, and career motivation, as an individual variable, in order to assist deadwood and solid citizen in finding resolutions to the career-related problems that they are currently fighting against (Jung and Tak, 2009; Cole, Brunch and Vogel, 2006).

Employees working in other areas of IFS
This study investigated three investment banks in Ireland due to the number of restructuring and downsizing activities since 2008 financial crises. Further research could include employees working in other areas of the IFS such as retail banking to confirm the generalisability of the findings.

Research tools

As the career plateau concept can come across as a sensitive topic, it is recommended that future research should use a snowball sampling technique to identify plateau participants. This can be done by sending the survey out only to plateau employees to complete and request that they forward it onto other employees in the same sector that are also experiencing this concept. Semi-structured interviews could also be introduced in this study to follow up on the questionnaire by means of incorporating timelines to enable participants to talk about areas they view as important to them (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013).

5.5 Recommendations for Irish Financial Sector

Following is a list of seven valuable well-conceptualised strategies to prevent ineffective plateau employees in an organisation and recommendations for organisations to consider:

Focus on skill based instead of career paths

Structural plateau ranked as the most important type of career plateau experienced by employees. Therefore, it is advised that HR professionals do not create unfulfilled expectations of promotions but as a substitute be flexible in their approach by taking proactive steps to make future career progression and promotional opportunities are more realistic in their organisations. For example, HR's focus and rewards should be on psychological growth (training and development, mentoring, project teams, lateral transfers) instead of hierarchical growth.

Continuous personal development

Professional plateau was demonstrated to be a valid concept in this study, and among professionals to cope with a career plateau. Therefore, it is imperative for both the employee and organisations to be familiar with their professional

development body in order to increase their credibility, provide practical tools and resources to support them in their career development.

Job redesign and training

Organisations must allow their employees to upgrade their skills by introducing skill enhancement programs such as job rotation, secondments to different business areas in the organisation, provide training as requested in performance appraisals and encourage them to maintain their currency in their profession (Lee, 2003).

Give honest feedback

Organisations can benefit from the responses provided by plateaued employees as to how they select and deal with feeling plateaued. Managers can use these responses as an incentive to engage in one-to-one meetings with their employees and proactive attempts to work through the challenges or lack thereof.

Monthly internal discussion groups

Rotate departments to meet on a monthly basis and talk about their department and projects they are currently working on. This allows other areas of the business to learn new market insight, understand different financial products and learn new skills.

Reduce voluntary turnover intentions

In order to prevent feelings of job content plateau, and to reduce voluntary turnover intentions, managers could give decision-making power along with increasing levels of responsibility and challenges as time unfolds (Heilmann *et al.,* 2008). It is also evident that co-worker's support can be an important contribution to employees' well-being and plays a key role for encouragement to remain with the organisation (Hofstetter and Cohan, 2014). Co-workers can also provide instrumental support (advice and co-operation) and affective

support (friendliness and acceptance) by increasing the social relationship among teams (Hofstetter and Cohan, 2014).

Health and wellness months

Employers could also introduce a health and wellness month to reduce negative work outcomes and to invest in their employees' well-being. For example, initiatives such as health eating, start a running club, arrange for EAP talks around stress and coping with change.

5.6   Final paragraph

Overall, from a theoretical viewpoint, this study contributes to the analysis of career plateau among professionals working in three multinational investment banks in Ireland. As very little work has been directed towards job satisfaction, career satisfaction and turnover intentions and their relationship with career plateau post Celtic Tiger years, the findings of this study opens the research on career development to be investigated further in Ireland. For that reason, the findings of this study could be used to advance research in this area and can be utilised to assist organisations and individuals to recognise when symptoms of career plateau emerge and the ways to overcome this.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Model of Managerial Careers

Current Performance	Likelihood of Future Promotion	
	Low	**High**
High	**Solid Citizens** *(Effective plateauees)* Do satisfactory work but perceived as having little chance for future advancement	**Stars** Doing outstanding work and viewed as having high potential for continued advancement
Low	**Deadwood** *(Ineffective plateauees)* Individuals do unsatisfactory work and have little potential for advancement	**Learners** Individuals such as trainees have high potential for advancement but perform below standard

Adapted from Ference *et al*. (1977) 'Model of Managerial States, Figure 1', Managing the career plateau. *Academy of Management*, 2(4): pp. 602-612.

Appendix 2

Research Onion
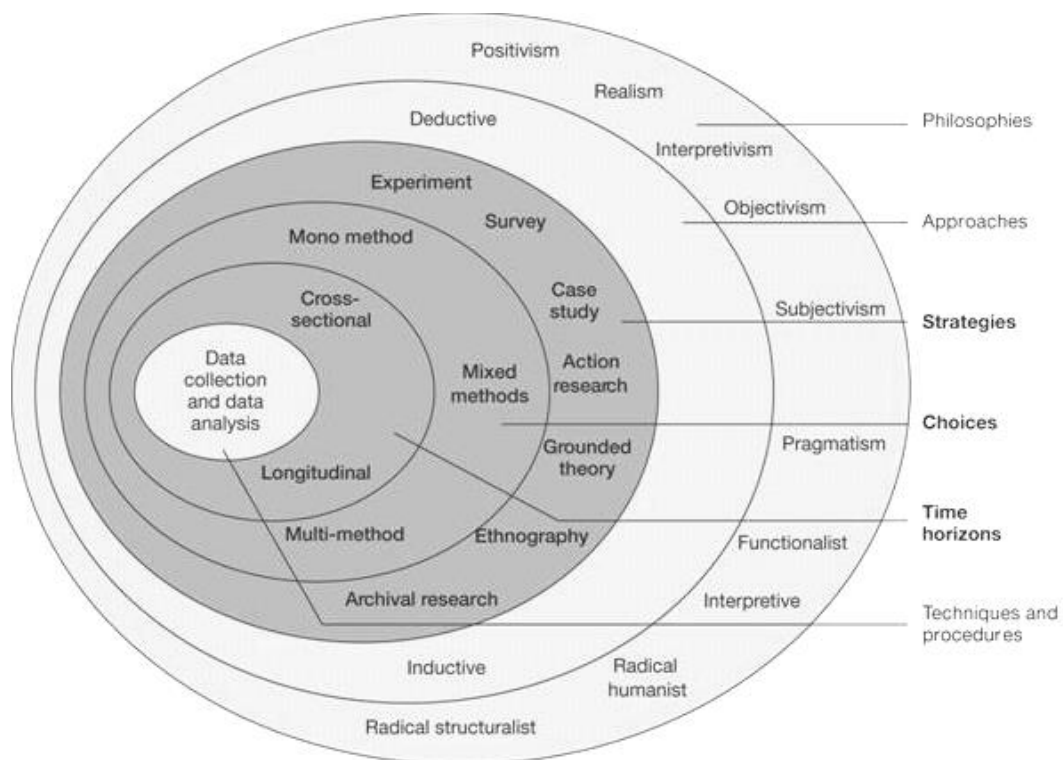
Saunders *et al*., 2007 'Research onion, Figure 5.1', Research methods for business students, fourth edition. London: Pearson Education Limited, p. 132.

Appendix 3

Sample email that was sent by HR to participants

Research name: Natasha Herbst-Bergin

Research study: MA in Human Resource Management

Institution: National College of Ireland

Dear Employee,

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to explore the nature of career plateau and its effect on work attitudes. All information will remain confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. Your contribution to this study will add a significant insight into this concept.

> **Please read the following statements below and if you understand the statements and you wish to participate in this study please indicate your agreement to take part by clicking on the link below.**

Eligibility guidelines include the following demographic restriction: currently working in the Irish Financial Sector, are over the age of 30 and have three or more years' service with your organisation.

- I have read and understand the description of this study
- I willing consent to participate in this study
- I understand that I can withdraw at any time without consent from this study
- I understand that my identity will remain anonymous and contribution will be confidential.

The link to the questionnaire:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1OvUN3OzW3WL-yy2J0eQPwJzPei4u-bGDQ-YyXEGhKsc/viewform?c=0&w=1&usp=mail_form_link

Appendix 4

Questionnaire

Career Plateau, Job Satisfaction and Career Satisfaction

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

To conduct research on career plateau and to establish if it is still a relevant issue today. The research also explores coping strategies and moderators to reduce the negative experience of career plateau.

PARTICIPANTS

I would greatly appreciate your participation and your valid contribution for collecting data to this study. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from this study at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The survey will ask for some demographic information in order to interpret results more accurately. All answers are anonymous. No one other than the researcher will see your completed questionnaire.

INSTRUCTIONS

1). Base your answer on your own thoughts and experiences
2). Answer each question by selecting the relevant number on the scale
3). The survey will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete
4). Enjoy the survey

Continue »

14% completed

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Your future opportunities in your current company

1 Strongly disagree   2 Disagree   3 Undecided
4 Agree   5 Strongly agree

1. I expect to be constantly challenged in my job in the future *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

2. My current job tasks and activities will not become routine for me in the future *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

3. I will not continue to learn and grow a lot in my current job *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

4. My current job responsibilities will not increase significantly in the future *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

5. I will be challenged in my current job *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

6. My current job will not continually require me to develop my abilities and knowledge *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

7. My opportunities for upward movement are limited in my present company *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

8. I have reached a point where I do not expect to move much higher in my company *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

9. The likelihood that I will get ahead in my company is limited *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

10. I am likely to obtain a much higher job title in another company *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

11. I expect to advance to a higher level in the near future in my current company *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

12. I would take a lateral move if it involved interesting work or required new skills *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

13. My job provides opportunities for me to keep up to date in my profession *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

14. My job is challenging *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

15. I am learning new things on my job that would enhance my professional standing *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

[« Back] [Continue »]

28% completed

87

How satisfied are you with your career

1 Strongly disagree   2 Disagree   3 Undecided
4 Agree   5 Strongly agree

16. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career so far *

          1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

17. I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals *

          1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

18. I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for income *

          1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

19. I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for advancement *

          1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

20. I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for the development of new skills *

          1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

Your coping strategies to career plateau

21. If applicable, please list all ways you have tried or are actually trying to cope or deal with lack of promotions in your organisation. This can include things you have done at work as well as off the job to cope.

[   ]

22. If applicable, please list all ways you have tried or are actually trying to cope or deal with lack of challenges and responsibilities in your organisation. This can include things you have done at work as well as off the job to cope.

[   ]

[« Back] [Continue »]   57% completed

How satisfied are you with your current role

1 Disagree very much   2 Disagree moderately   3 Disagree slightly
4 Agree slightly   5 Agree moderately   6 Agree very much

23. I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do *

          1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

24. There is really too little chance for promotion on my job *

          1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

25. My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job *

          1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

26. I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

27. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

28. Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

29. I like the people I work with *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

30. I sometimes feel my job is meaningless *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

31. Communication seems to be good within my current company *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

32. Raises are too few and far between *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

33. Those who do well on the job stand a fair change of being promoted *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

34. My supervisor is unfair to me *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

35. The benefits I receive at my current company are as good as most other organisations would offer *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

36. I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

37. My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

38. I find I have to work harder at my job because of the lack of support from the people I work with *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

39. I enjoy doing the things I do at work *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

40. The goals of my current company are not clear to me *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

41. I feel unappreciated by my current company when I think about what they pay me *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

42. People get ahead as fast here as they would do in other organisations *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

43. My supervisor shows too little interest in my feelings and concerns *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

44. The benefit package we have is equitable *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

45. There are few rewards for those who work here *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

46. I have too much to do at work *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

47. I enjoy working with my co-workers *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

48. I often feel that I do not know what is going on within my current company *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

49. I feel a sense of pride in doing my job *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

50. I feel satisfied with my chances for a salary increase *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

51. There are benefits we do not have in my current company which we should have *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

52. I like my supervisor *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

53. I have too much paperwork *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

54. I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

55. I am satisfied with my chances for promotion *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

56. There is too much bickering and fighting at work *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

57. My job is enjoyable *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

58. Work assignments are not fully explained *

1 2 3 4 5 6

Disagree very much ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Agree very much

How do you feel about your current job and company

1 Strongly disagree   2 Disagree   3 Undecided
4 Agree   5 Strongly agree

59. I often think about applying for a job somewhere else *

      1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

60. If I had different alternatives I would probably not work in the same organisation as now *

      1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

61. After all I have been through it, is not going to take much before I apply for a job somewhere else *

      1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

62. I will probably not stay at the same company until I reach retirement

      1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

Profile questions

Gender *
- ○ Male
- ○ Female

Age *
- ○ 20-29
- ○ 30-39
- ○ 40-49
- ○ 50 and onwards

Total number of years you have been working at your current company *

[⊕]

Total number of years you have been working in your current role with the same tasks and responsibilities *

[⊕]

What is your job grade / level at your current company?
- ○ Assistant
- ○ Administrator / Coordinator / Executive
- ○ Supervisor
- ○ Manager
- ○ Director
- ○ Other: [   ]

Approximately how long ago was your last promotion? *
- ○ less than a year ago
- ○ 1 to 2 years
- ○ 3 years and over
- ○ Never

Appendix 5

Job satisfaction variables

Variable and sourcs	Code	Items
Job satisfaction survey	Pay	I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do
By *Spector (1999)*		Raises are too few and far between (R)
		I feel unappreciated by the organisation when I think about what they pay me (R)
		I feel satisfied with my changes for salary increase
	Promotion	There is really too little chance for promotion on my job (R)
		Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted
		People get ahead as fast here as they do in other places
		I am satisfied with my changes for promotion
	Supervisor	My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job
		My supervisor is unfair to me (R)
		I like my supervisor
		My supervisor shows too little interest in the feelings of subordinated (R)
	Benefits	I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive (R)
		The benefits we receive are as good as good as most other organisations offer
		There are benefits we do not have which we should have (R)
		The benefit package we have is equitable (R)
	Rewards	When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive
		I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated (R)

	There are few rewards for those who work here (R)
	I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be (R)
Conditions	Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult (R)
	My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red type
	I have too much to do at work
	I have too much paperwork (R)
Co-workers	I like the people I work with
	I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of people I work with (R)
	I enjoy my co-workers
	There is too much bickering and fighting at work (R)
Nature of work	I sometimes feel my job is meaningless (R)
	I feel a sense of pride in doing my job
	My job is enjoyable
	I like doing the things I do at work
Communication	Communication seems to be good within the organisation
	The goals of this organisation are not clear to me (R)
	I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the organisation (R)
	Work assignments are not fully explained (R)

Appendix 6

Multiple regression for career satisfaction and professional plateau

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.271[a]	.073	.056	.87992	.073	4.276	1	54	.043*
2	.340[b]	.116	.065	.87601	.042	1.241	2	52	.297

a. Predictors: (Constant), Professional plateau

b. Predictors: (Constant), Professional, Time in service, Age

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.475	.463		5.351	.000
	Professional plateau	.279	.135	.271	2.068	.043*
2	(Constant)	2.729	.495		5.513	.000
	Professional plateau	.298	.139	.289	2.142	.037*
	Age	.000	.280	.000	.001	.999
	Time in service	-.038	.031	-.206	-1.203	.234

a. Dependent Variable: Career satisfaction

Note: *$p < 0.05$

Appendix 7

Multiple regression for turnover intention and job content plateau

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.461[a]	.213	.151	.94276	.213	3.441	4	51	.015*
2	.516[b]	.266	.193	.91900	.054	3.672	1	50	.061

a. Predictors: (Constant), Last promotion, Job tenure, Age, Time in service

b. Predictors: (Constant), Last promotion, Job tenure, Age, Time in service, JCP

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.894	.413		11.847	.000
	Age	-.729	.298	-.406	-2.446	.018*
	Time in service	-.022	.041	-.108	-.541	.591
	Job tenure	.054	.039	.198	1.397	.169
	Last promotion	-.024	.112	-.030	-.214	.831
2	(Constant)	3.449	.855		4.032	.000
	Age	-.717	.290	-.399	-2.468	.017*
	Time in service	-.023	.040	-.109	-.561	.577
	Job tenure	.026	.040	.096	.650	.519
	Last promotion	-.030	.109	-.039	-.280	.781
	Job content plateau	.484	.253	.254	1.916	.061

a. Dependent Variable: Turnover intentions

Note: *$p < 0.05$

Appendix 8

Multiple regression for turnover intention and double plateau

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.461[a]	.213	.151	.94276	.213	3.441	4	51	.015
2	.603[b]	.363	.300	.85622	.151	11.830	1	50	.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Last promotion, Job tenure, Age, Time in service

b. Predictors: (Constant), Last promotion, Job tenure, Age, Time in service, Double plateau

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.894	.413		11.847	.000
	Age	-.729	.298	-.406	-2.446	.018*
	Time in service	-.022	.041	-.108	-.541	.591
	Job tenure	.054	.039	.198	1.397	.169
	Last promotion	-.024	.112	-.030	-.214	.831
2	(Constant)	1.624	1.022		1.589	.118
	Age	-.671	.271	-.374	-2.477	.017*
	Time in service	-.027	.037	-.133	-.733	.467
	Job tenure	.026	.036	.094	.709	.482
	Last promotion	-.043	.102	-.055	-.425	.673
	Double plateau	.974	.283	.406	3.440	.001*

a. Dependent Variable: TI

Note: $*p < 0.05$