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CAREER PLATEAUIING: A SURVEY ON EFFECTS OF CAREER PLATEAUIING ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (CASE STUDY: INSURANCE COMPANIES IN SANANDAJ CITY)

GolBahar Samiei¹ and *Addel Salavati²

¹*Department of Business Administration*

²*Department of Management, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj Branch, Sanandaj, Iran*

**Author for Correspondence*

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study is conducted to identify the effects of career plateauing on knowledge management in insurance companies in Sanandaj city. The population of the study consists of all employees in insurance companies in Sanandaj city counting 741 people. Using Cochran formula and by means of stratified random sampling method, the sample size, including 290 people, was selected. **Method:** This study is a quantitative research in terms of the strategic and applied research in terms of objectives. This study is a descriptive-correlational research in terms of implementation and it is particularly based on the structural equation modeling. Milliman Career Plateau Survey (1992) and Darroch (2005) knowledge management questionnaire were used to assess the career plateauing questionnaires. Cronbach's alpha method was used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaires and validity was assessed by using formal validity for the two variables calculating 0.902 and 0.920 respectively. **Results:** Final Results of the analysis showed a significant inverse correlation between career plateauing, and its levels (content, structure and life plateauing), with knowledge management in insurance companies in Sanandaj city. The results also showed that content plateauing has the greatest effect on knowledge management.

Keywords: *Career Plateauing, Knowledge Management, Insurance Companies, Sanandaj City*

INTRODUCTION

Various organizations and companies have begun to join the process of knowledge in recent years, and emerging new concepts such as vocational, knowledge workers, knowledge management and knowledge organizations represent the intensification of this process. Peter Drucker believes that utilization of these concepts indicates the creation of a new type of organization in which the power of the mind replaces with the strength of the labor.

According to this concept, societies that have more knowledge can expect to remain in the stream of development and progress. Thus, natural resources are no longer important than knowledge; the knowledge organization would gain such capabilities and great power that can attain a great capability out of a trivial source of power (Abtahi and Salvati, 2006). Since knowledge has no value by itself, it should be used by individuals; accordingly, it seems mandatory to care and appreciate those who apply the knowledge, as well as those who produce it. Hence, knowledge management, as a process flowing out the knowledge and deliver it to its original place, will be of great importance (Mirpourifard and Mohebbi, 2011). Knowledge sharing activities in the organizations have been improved the individual learning process in the organization, developed the creativity and consequently improved the individual performance in the organization. On the other hand, if institutionalization of the process of the knowledge management doesn't occur in the organization, the organization will gradually lose its competitive advantage. Therefore, knowledge management has become a critical issue for the success of organizations. Organizations require creating trust, cooperation and partnership to develop the culture of knowledge management. Knowledge management will run easily if an organization appreciates and comprises values such as justice and trust, but the process of change will be faced with difficulties in an organization lacking a culture to create knowledge management (Esmailpanah and Kayat-Moghadam, 2013).

Research Article

Researchers have figure out that employees who are in an appropriate career path within the organization are progressive and more motivated at their work, they have better extra-role performance, satisfied and the desire to leave the organization and absence from the work is lesser among them rather than other employees. Hence, organizations are always looking for effective methods to manage career path for staff (Rotondo & Perewe, 2000). The researchers also focused on the management of the career path in various organizations in order to identify factors improving the management career path. One of the affecting factors in the career path which is always influencing organizational outcomes is a career plateau phenomenon. According to many researchers career plateau phenomenon has quickly become critical for organizations and managers; and certainly this would be one of the most serious issues in the next decades, requiring good management skills and decision making to evade employee's dissatisfaction (Salami, 2010: 500). Staffs that get stuck in the stage with no promotion and hope less prosperity to progress are inclined to quit the job due to low opportunities in the organization. The lack of career advancement or promotion for a remarkable number of employees is a shock and it has a direct negative impression on their job satisfaction, motivation and performance (Ongori and Agolla, 2009).

Re-engineering, downsizing, organizational restructuring, mergers and strategic alliances, and above of all, technological advances and growing competition in business environments are the main reasons of career plateauing resulting in getting stuck in a position with no hope to promote (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006). Since most of the staff sees promotion as a sign of progress and as a main indicator for measuring success in their career path (Appelbaum & Finestone, 1994), the necessity of paying attention to profession and career seems inevitable by all organizations. Staff expects the organization to provide opportunities for learning, and professional opportunities that are very useful and effective for their future career prosperity. If employees suppose that promotion in the career path is inaccessible, they will seek their fortune in the other organizations; thus, they will tend to leave the organization (Lee, 2003). The recent studies at the world's major organizations show that at least 40% of the sampled population is in search for new job opportunities because of dissatisfaction with the career path, and many of them leave their organizations once they find better opportunities (Conner, 2014). Accordingly, the present study aims at investigating the relationship between job plateauing and knowledge management in insurance companies in Sanandaj city.

Research Objectives

The Main Objective

Recognizing the effects of career plateauing on knowledge management in insurance companies of Sanandaj city.

Secondary Objectives of the Study

- Identifying the effects of structural plateauing on knowledge management in insurance companies.
- Identifying the effects of content plateauing on knowledge management in insurance companies.
- Identifying the effects of life plateauing on knowledge management in insurance companies.

Research Questions

The Main Question

How can career plateau influence on knowledge management in insurance companies of Sanandaj city?

Secondary Research Question

To what extent structural plateauing influence can on knowledge management in insurance companies?

To what extent content plateauing can influence on knowledge management in insurance companies?

To what extent life plateauing influence can on knowledge management in insurance companies?

Literature Review: Theoretical Foundation

Knowledge Management

Knowledge in this study means the perception results from data analysis and information that leads to understanding the nature and structure of a problem (understanding what or how a specific problem occurs) and provides opportunity to solve the similar problems and to deal with issues. Knowledge management is an attempt to get rid of the confusion happening when organizations face with a complex

Research Article

and ambiguous knowledge environment at the present time. The confusion results from creation, selection, utilization, sharing, storage and preservation of knowledge. Since knowledge management is the complex issue, there are many given definitions of knowledge and knowledge management. Knowledge management is an attempt to get rid of the confusion resulting from exposure to complex and ambiguous environmental knowledge of the contemporary period. Michael (2011) stated at the International Conference on Knowledge Management "a collection of more than 100 definitions of knowledge management has compiled", indicating the importance of knowledge and its management" (Abdi and Salvati, 2012). McInerney (2002) argues that "knowledge management is an effort to gain and increase useful knowledge within the organization by encouraging communications, providing opportunities for learning and sharing appropriate knowledge (McInerney, 2002). "Knowledge management provides views, approaches and insight to proper investment of information and data by means of the best methods of application. Knowledge management contributes to the decision making process regarding where, how and when to build, create, and accumulate new knowledge, as well as the causes of creating such knowledge (Allen and Radiyng, 2010). Wiig (1997) argues that "It [knowledge management] is a systematic, explicit and deliberate building, renewal and application of knowledge to maximize a firm's knowledge-related effectiveness and returns from its knowledge assets" (Zahedi and Najari, 2005). Cong and Pandya (2003) argue that knowledge management provides the following benefits to an organization: improve the performance of the organization through increasing the efficiency, productivity, quality, and innovation in organizations managing their knowledge and claiming a higher amount of productivity. Increasing access to knowledge can contribute employees and organizations to improve decision making process, it facilitates the process, reduces overlapping, increases innovation and also provides employees with more accurate data and increases the level of cooperation among the staff. In other words, knowledge management can reduce the operating cost and improves customer service in the public sectors. Similar to traditional assets such as inventory and capital resources, an increase in financial value of the organizations provided by individual knowledge behavior is considered as an asset and recognized as a source of value creation which is provided by increasing the transfer of knowledge. Accordingly, organizations proceed towards identifying the knowledge management initiatives as facilitators of strategic competitive advantages (Cong and Pandya, 2003). Knowledge management involves four dimensions as follows:

A. Knowledge creation: Knowledge creation focuses on the ability of organizations to create new and useful ideas and solutions for problem solving. Knowledge creation is an important process in which motivation, empathy, experience and chance play an important role. Knowledge creation indicates to all process and activities help inflowing new knowledge into the organization. Individuals and groups working within and outside the organization help management system to encourage innovation and create a training plan based on the needs and goals of the organization by curving motivation and support. This provides a collaborative environment which helps the organization to get the data and transfer them into information that eventually ends with the creation of knowledge (Abtahi and Salvati, 2006).

B. Storage and maintenance of knowledge: Storage and maintenance of knowledge consist of activities help lasting knowledge in the organization. In this regard, it can be pointed to organizational knowledge. One of the main elements of this benefit is organizational knowledge. The main function of organizational memory is to maintain the organizational knowledge. But it should be noted that organizational memory is only capable of holding explicit knowledge. Individual memory which is the source and basis of knowledge should be taken into consideration alongside with organizational memory. Establish a close association between these two types of memory is the key to success for effective knowledge management programs (Ibid, 2006).

C. The conversion and transfer of knowledge (distribution): One of the serious problems and challenges of knowledge management is to converse and transfer the hidden knowledge to explicit one. This indicates the process and activities indicating the transferring the knowledge from one form to another or from an individual or group to another person or group. Activities such as knowledge, coding and communication, translation, conversion, interpretation and treatment of knowledge play an important role

Research Article

at this stage. The remarkable point in knowledge transfer is that the knowledge transfer should be accompanied by absorbing knowledge (Davenport, 1998).

D) Application of knowledge: knowledge is valuable when it is used. Knowledge management activities should not only affect the organization's major and grand activities and programs, but it should affect the organization's daily and routine programs (Bhatt, 2001). Knowledge management attempts to ensure that organization uses the knowledge usefully and sensibly (Ibid, 1998).

Plateauing

Although promotion and advancement in the career path are very competitive and difficult nowadays, a remarkable number of employees begin their career expecting promotion, gaining power, and getting the best rewards and reaching the highest positions (Clark, 2005). Consequently, a remarkable number of staff experiences career plateauing before achieving their ideals. Job plateauing represents a condition in which promotion at both vertical and horizontal axes are limited or abandoned. According to Ference *et al.*, (1977), career plateauing is a point in a career path in which the ability to move vertically upward is decreased (Sani *et al.*, 2006).

Foster *et al.*, (2004) assert that plateauing is the state of hopelessness and mental failure when employees experience temporary or permanent plateau or stuck in their professional career (Foster *et al.*, 2004). In another definition, career plateau is a point where employees find their job as a non-challenge profession and find fewer opportunities to develop their abilities and promotion (Lee, 2003). Some studies define career plateau as a duration when staff serve at a special position or profession for a long period of time. Accordingly, serving at a position for five years and then expecting no promotion is represented as plateauing, while according to most scholars serving in a period between 3 to 5 years at a particular position at an organization is considered as a career plateau (Miles *et al.*, 2013).

Sandholtz (2003) assert that plateauing is the criteria and the standard language for promotion and he believes that plateauing is often associated with negative implications. For example, plateauing for professional psychologists is a period when individual learning stop progressing. In other words, a recession and the lack of progress in career path is considered as plateauing and this is a negative and unpleasant situation for those who always like promotion and advancement in their career (Taleghani, 2002).

Bardwick's Three Factorial Plateauing

Some scholars have performed a wide study on behavioral, mental and professional problems like Bardwick that distinguished between three kinds of career plateauing (Schollossberg, 2004). She includes three factors: Structural factors, content factors of plateauing and life factors.

1- Structural Factors: This factor is related to the organizational structure and job promotion. Bardwick asserts that when one has progressed to a point where the organizational structure prevents him or her from moving up, due to non-availability of vacancies in higher grades or he or she has not the proper qualifications for moving up (Bardwick, 1986). "The rule in this case is almost 99% correct because almost all the way up in the hierarchy in the organization's career path experience the career plateau." Bardwick said.

2- Content Plateau: Plateauing occurs when one has mastered the job and there is no longer a sense of challenge in the current position. Judith (1986) recommended that employees also plateau when their probability of increased growth or challenges associated with the current job is low. When increasing job-specific task responsibility that offers developmental opportunities becomes unattainable, an employee is said to experience a content plateau. Content-plateaued employees may already be proficient in their jobs, expect no further challenges to be associated with the job, and feel stifled regarding the job's content. Content-plateaued employees are no longer intrigued by their work and often feel they have reached a dead end. Content plateauing is common to all organizations and even academic organizations experience it.

3- Life plateauing: Bardwick states that "life plateauing refers to an individual's feeling of being trapped or stuck in their roles outside of work." Life plateauing consists of sense of force to do the chores individuals are no longer challenged by their jobs. The individual has no responsibilities to do the tasks

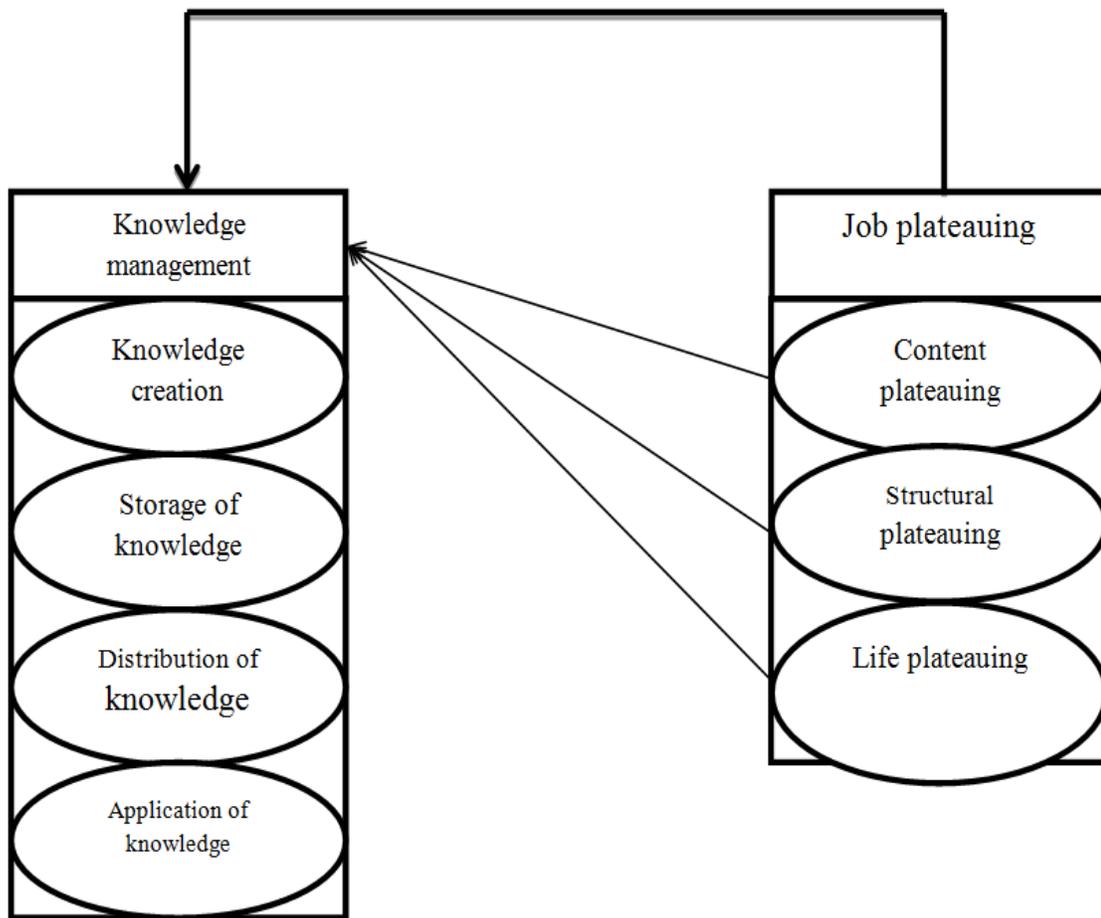
Research Article

and there is overall staleness of the job itself. In other words, the stillness of life is a sense of personal feeling to maintain that people are stuck on the outside function of his/her work. These factors are associated with an individual's life. Bardwick (1986) believes that when a person's life is routine and individual feels no interest and pleasure in his life, he is already experiencing life plateauing (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006).

Review of the Literature

The most important researches carried out in this field are as follows:

Jung & Tak (2008) in a research entitled "The Effects of Perceived Career Plateau on Employees' Attitudes" suggested that those who have a lot of motivation establish ideal goals for their career path and they will have more confidence in an unpleasant environmental situation; accordingly, this increases the level of responsibility, job satisfaction and commitment in job plateau conditions. Vahedi *et al.*, (2014) in a survey titled as "A Survey on Effect of job characteristics on career plateauing in the career progress path of human asset" found out that variables of job characteristics, lack of skill variety, low career identity, insignificant jobs, lack of independence and lack of feedback play an important role on effecting the employees' career plateauing.



Sadeghi and Mobayen (2014) in a study, entitled "A Study on the relationship between perceptions of organizational justice and career plateauing based on Bardwick's three factorial plateauing model in Power Distribution Company of Qom" showed the positive attitude to work, management, department or entire organization contributes to increase of motivation to do the work while the reverse idea is also true when there is a lack of positive attitude. Morales *et al.*, (2000) studied the transformational leadership influence on organizational performance through organizational learning and innovation in a British

Research Article

organization. The results indicated that both factors play the significant roles. Taminiau *et al.*, (2007) in a research entitled "Innovation in management consulting firms through informal knowledge sharing" in the management consulting firms in the Netherlands described that the main obstacles for innovation in Dutch consultancy firms by focusing on the strength of informal knowledge sharing as an avenue for innovation. They concluded that lack of support of the management from the innovation process is one of the main obstacles to innovation in Dutch companies. This is an applied research study conducted through interviews with 29 consultation companies in the Netherlands. Darroch (2005) in a paper known as "Knowledge management, innovation and firm performance" argues that, however, knowledge in itself is a source, the effective management of knowledge within the organization help organizations to benefit more from other sources in their firms. Darroch claim that all three components of the knowledge management are interrelated with each other and they are associated with innovation as well. Ardekani *et al.*, (2010), in a study entitled "The Role of Knowledge Management in boosting innovation" concluded that one of the factors contributing to increasing innovation in organizations to stay ahead of the competition is knowledge management. Aligholi *et al.*, (2012) in a research entitled "the effects of knowledge management and intellectual capital on competitive advantage" emphasized on the role of knowledge in a competitive advantage and concluded that although the regression analysis confirms the impact of all the variables, the knowledge sharing and knowledge storage had more impression on competitive advantage rather than the other factors.

According to the reviews of the above-mentioned researches, the following theoretical model can be conducted based on the hypotheses presented.

Conceptual model (Bardwick's three factorial plateauing (1986) and Darroch's knowledge management (2005))

The following hypotheses were tested:

Research Hypothesis

Main Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between plateauing in career progression path and knowledge management in insurance companies of Sanandaj city

Subordinate Hypothesis

1. There is a significant relationship between structural plateauing and knowledge management in insurance companies.
2. There is a significant relationship between content plateauing and knowledge management in insurance companies.
3. There is a significant relationship between life plateauing and knowledge management in insurance companies

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

This study is practical and it is based on the applied research method in terms of objectives, and descriptive in terms of data gathering and analysis. The time period in this study is single cross and, in terms of the relationship between variables is based on the structural equation. The population of study consists of all employees in insurance companies in Sanandaj city counting 741 people. The sample size was estimated 290 people sampled by means of stratified random sampling method.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaires and the educational software SPSS21. Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was used to determine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The results were 0.920 and 0.902 for career plateauing and knowledge distribution questionnaires respectively. Questionnaires were examined by using formal validity.

Statistical Analysis

The most frequent subjects included male participants with ages ranging from 30 to 40 years and 41 to 50 years, 54.8% and 19.7% respectively, comprises the most and the least frequency. Educational degree of

Research Article

the participants ranged from bachelor degree from university to diploma from high school institutions comprises the highest and the lowest frequency, 42.1% and 3.4% respectively. The participants' working experience was 5 to 10 years and more than 21 years consists of the highest, 32.4%, and the lowest, 4.8%, level of frequency respectively. 67.9 % of participants were married and the highest frequency for employed participants belonged to those with contract employment consists of 56.6%.

Inferential Statistics

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results on plateauing in career progression path and knowledge management

	Factors	The mean	SD	Significant level (sig)	The error	Hypothesis	Conclusion
1	Content plateauing	2.93	0.76	0.062	0.05	H ₀	Normal
2	Structural plateauing	3.25	0.58	0.14	0.05	H ₀	Normal
3	Life plateauing	3.03	0.77	0.38	0.05	H ₀	Normal
4	Creation of knowledge	2.96	0.86	0.06	0.05	H ₀	Normal
5	Storage of knowledge	3.31	0.80	0.12	0.05	H ₀	Normal
6	Knowledge distribution	4.171	0.971	0.072	0.05	H₀	Normal
7	Application of knowledge	4.168	0.763	0.096	0.05	H₀	Normal

Since the level of significance is more than 0.05, all the factors are at the 95% confidence coefficient with normal distribution, so parametric tests can be used to test them. The sample t-test was used to test the main hypothesis.

The main hypothesis test: there is a significant relationship between plateauing in career progression path and knowledge management in insurance companies in Sanandaj city.

Tested value = 3

	T	Degrees of freedom	Significance level	The average difference	Confidence coefficient	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
Structural plateau	98.321	289	0.002	0.605	3.420	4.025
Plateau content	101.241	286	0.000	1.753	2.795	4.548
Life Plateau	95.443	286	0.001	0.281	2.773	3.0542

One-sample t-test was used to measure the mean of the career plateau and each of its components. Since the level of significance of the test for all variables is smaller than 0.05, the null hypothesis indicates that equality of the means of the each variable is rejected by applying number 3. Thus, when both high and low limits are positive in all the elements, it is concluded that career plateauing among staff in insurance companies at level error of 0.05 for all studied variables is more than average range of (3).

Research Article

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the subordinate hypotheses.

H0: There is no significant relationship between the structural, content and life plateauing variables and knowledge management.

H1: There is a significant relationship between the structural, content and life plateauing variables and knowledge management.

Research hypotheses		Significant Level	Correlation coefficient	Test results	
Research hypotheses	Research hypotheses				
Secondary hypotheses	First	The structural plateauing affects knowledge management in insurance companies.	0.000	0.860-	Confirmation
	Second	The content plateauing affects knowledge management in insurance companies.	0.000	0.798-	Confirmation
	Third	The life plateauing affects knowledge management in insurance companies.	0.000	0.762-	Confirmation

The above table shows that the attained statistical significance value is less than the significance level of 0.05, so H0 is not endorsed while H1 which is the main research hypothesis indicating significant relationship between the variables is accepted. In other words, organizations established with knowledge management structure and there is enough knowledge available for the promotion of employees, as well as employees are skilled enough and individuals have sufficient and adequate knowledge to progress in their career and life, there would be less plateauing which is demonstrated with negative correlation coefficient in this study.

Conclusion

This study aimed at identifying the relationship between career plateauing and knowledge management in insurance companies. The results of the study show that there is a negative, but significant correlation between career plateauing (structural, and life plateauing) and knowledge management. In other words, when career plateauing increases, the knowledge management decreases. Thus, it can be claimed that knowledge management in the organization will serve as a main function to decrease career plateauing state. This means those who have a lot of motivation try to establish ideal goals for their career path and they will have more confidence in the unpleasant environmental situation; accordingly, this increases the level of responsibility, job satisfaction and commitment in the career plateau conditions. Content plateauing in career path results in quitting the job, truancy, frequent changes of career and it can also influence the attitudes and behavior of other members of the working group. In addition, such features as organizational factors, individual and group characteristics, cultural characteristics and motivation influence knowledge management. Since the findings in this study is compatible with those in Jung and Tak (2008), Connor (2008), Vahedi and Rasouli (2014), Sadeghi and Mobayen (2014) and Wang and the Neo (2010), following suggestions are offered by the researchers:

- Organizations can decrease the employees' plateauedness with redesigning jobs and redefining work processes.
- Some activities like developing the career growth opportunities, removing barriers to move horizontally and downwards and help employees preparing for new challenges should be provided in the field of career development.
- Informing employees regarding career plateau is critical to secure job quitting of the best staff, so it is recommended that organizations prepare an annual conference to be held within the organization for a few hours each year.

Research Article

- It is recommended that organizations attempt to decrease undesirable effects of career plateau by such strategies as job rotation, mentoring, career development and career enrichment.
- Organizations should encourage the knowledge management culture in the organization and then establish knowledge-based system in the organization in order to gain competitive advantage in producing high quality knowledge-based products which is replaced with old production methods.
- Holding the educational courses annually or frequently is also recommended to update employees' knowledge and their acquaintance with sciences. Appreciating the new staff in order to renew organizational knowledge is advantageous for organizations as respecting skilled employees to use their experiences are beneficial.
- To strengthen the exchanging and transferring knowledge between staff and employees, on the one hand, and customers, on the other hand, is also recommended. The internal job rotation also causes to distribution of knowledge within the organization, so organizations need to consider the job rotation.

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Research Article

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