Impacts of Career Plateau on Professional Commitment, Organizational Commitment, and Counterproductive Work Behaviors

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Recent changes in the business environment of sport organizations in Korea, such as the restructuring and downsizing trend, as well as over-saturated labor market, have resulted in greater numbers of people competing for fewer promotional opportunities. Consequently, more individuals are experiencing longer stay in the same position with fewer prospects for future vertical mobility, forcing many people into the plateaued career. In particular, employees in small-to-medium business units like sport organizations in Korea confront a more difficult situation. In smaller organizations compared with larger organizations, position immobility prevails and vertical career movement is more limited. Literature on career plateau propounds the basic premise that this career situation, which occurs when individual has limited vertical and horizontal movement, is fundamentally unsatisfying experience for working individuals (Ference et al., 1977; Veiga, 1981).

The term career plateau refers to the feeling of failure or frustration that individuals may experience following a temporary or permanent halt in the progression of their career (Cardinal & Lamoureux, 1992). Bardwick (1986) initially suggested that individuals may experience two different forms of career-related plateau (i.e., structural plateau, job content plateau). Structural plateau results when an individual has little chance of further vertical movement within an organization. On the other hand, job content plateau occurs when the individual is no longer challenged by his or her job responsibilities. While not all studies have found negative consequences associated with career plateau (Nicholson, 1993), perceptions of career plateau can have negative consequences for both individuals and organizations. Individuals may develop counter-productive attitudes and behaviors, and their physical and psychological well-being may also suffer. Repercussions for the organization may include reduction in organizational commitment, increase in external mobility and decrease in work performance (Glemire, Saba, & Gagnon, 1999; Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of career plateau classified into structural plateau and job content plateau on professional and organizational commitment, and counterproductive work behavior among sport management professionals. 238 questionnaires from professionals whose work were related to sport management were used to analyze the proposed hypotheses using LISREL. Results showed that structural plateau of sport organization employees had negative impact on professional commitment (β = -.15, t = -1.89) and organizational commitment (β = -.37, t = -4.14). In addition, structural (β = .16, t = 2.42) and job content plateau (β = -.18, t = -2.30) showed positive impacts on counterproductive work behaviors. Finally, both professional (β = -.27, t = -4.15) and organizational commitment (β = -.37 t = -5.30) revealed negative impacts on counterproductive work behaviors.

The results of this research have implications for both individuals and organizations. As many studies have suggested, the lack of flexibility in terms of promotion and task variety leads to poor results in terms of employees’ satisfaction and commitment. This is even worse if the only perspective is to stay in the same job and task for the rest of one’s working life. Therefore, individualized and flexible career systems must be preferred over standardized career systems. Flexibility can be reached not only through vertical movement, but also through horizontal development like periodical job rotation, work in projects, and task variety. Further research implications for academicians and practitioners, and future research directions will be discussed in presentation.