



## The Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy on the Relationship between Job Content Plateau and Career Commitment

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### Abstract

The study examines the moderating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between job content plateau and career commitment. Data were collected from 235 business students in Taiwan. Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analysis were used. The result indicated that self-efficacy negatively moderated the relationship between job content plateau and career commitment. Specifically, the higher self-efficacy, the stronger effect of job content plateau on career commitment. The practical and future research implications were discussed.

**Keywords:** Job Content Plateau, Self-Efficacy, Career Commitment.

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## I. Introduction

With globalization, development of new technologies, and changing nature of labor markets, there are many different issues on career academic area from past to present (Baruch, 2003). In the past, many employees prefer long-term employment in a company. They expected their seniority would help them acquire advancement in the companies (Lee, 2003), and the reason may be because many employees consider promotion as symbolization of successful work (Appelbaum & Finestone, 1994). Nowadays, due to flatter organizational structures, instability of economic environment, and downsizing policy, more employees work in the same job for a long period of time, they have limited lateral and upward movement, and their careers represent cessation of promotion. The scholars described that these employees undergo career plateau (Jung & Tak, 2008; Lee, 2003; McCleese, Eby, Scharlau, & Hoffman, 2007). Further, career plateau reflects hindrance on promotion and lack of challenge in job content. Employee remain the same position in a longer period, they are likely to experience job content plateau. Employee would become bored with their job (Bardwick, 1986). In addition, plateaued employees become less optimistic and highly stressed (Elass & Ralston, 1989; Lee, 2003). Therefore, career plateau has been used as antecedent to undesirable work outcomes such as low job satisfaction, low career motivation, high turnover intentions, and low organizational commitment (Foster, Shastri, & Lonial, 2011; Jung & Tak, 2008; Heilmann, Holt, & Rilovick, 2008). Meyer and Allen (1993) introduced that organization commitment is highly related to career commitment. The antecedents of career commitment are career satisfaction and organization commitment. McCormick and Tiffin (1974) conducted that if workers perceive that their values and contributions are recognized in the workplace, they will exhibit a positive attitude and have greater career commitment. Also, career commitment represents the aspect of individual motivation for her or his career life. If people who have high career commitment in their life, they will express high motivation to overcome difficulties in workplace. In essence, high motivation explored the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is related to the personal performance. It provides the foundation for human motivation, well-being, personal confidence, accomplishment and sense of achievement (Bandura, 1986).

Many previous studies have shown that career plateau is a critical issue. Everyone in the different stages of life will suffer some problems. However, many studies were investigated the effect of career plateau on work attitudes and job satisfaction (e.g. Allen,

Poteet & Russell, 1998; Chao, 1990). Also, many studies stressed that career plateau is related to negative outcomes (e.g., Heilmann, Holt, & Rilovick, 2008; McCleese, Eby, Scharlau, & Hoffman, 2007; Lapalme, Tremblay, & Simard, 2009; Lee, 2003). Besides, most research focused on hierarchical plateaus (e.g., Near, 1980; Carnazza et al, 1981; Chao, 1990; Chay, 1995). Job content plateau has not received much empirical attention. Few studies examined the moderating effect of self-efficacy between job content plateau and career commitment. Due to the lack of studies to examine relationships among job content, self-efficacy, and career commitment, this study aims to explore the relationships among these three variables from individual and organization aspect and fill a gap in the literature by examining the circumstances under which employees who have reached a job content plateau may have fewer negative work attitudes such as lower career commitment.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Existing Research on Plateaus**

Ference, Stoners and Warren (1977) proposed the original concept of plateau. It was defined as “The point in a career where the likelihood of additional hierarchal is very low” (p.334). They indicated that plateau is failure or defeat which hinders understanding and management of careers. Veiga (1981) defined plateau as “the point at which future career mobility, including both upward and lateral moves, is in reasonable doubt because the length of time in the present position has been unduly prolonged” in the practice aspect (p.566). Feldman and Weitz (1988) concluded the concept of career plateau. They explained that hierarchal plateau is when workers get the point which they cannot move higher than current position, they will feel limited for their career development in the organization. The likelihood of getting promoted is limited. Job content plateau means that workers feel bored in their job content. They think that they have no challenges at work.

### **2.2 Career Commitment**

Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) introduced that career commitment is people's motivation to work towards personal advancement in their profession. Colarelli and Bishop (1990) described career commitment as “The development of personal career goals, the attachment to, identification with, and involvement in those goals.” (p.159). They noted that career commitment involved self-generated goals and commitment to one's own career. Goulet and Singh (2002) defined career commitment as “The extent to which someone identifies with and values his or her profession or vocation and the amount of time and effort spent acquiring relevant knowledge” (p.75). They stated that if a person is willing to exert energy and be

persistent in pursuing personal career goals, He or she could be considered to have high career commitment. In general, Career commitment is psychological concept, and it is related motivation, persistence, and willingness. Meyer and Allen (1991) conducted three-component model of organizational commitment. Three components of organization commitment are affective organization commitment, continuance organization commitment, and normative organization commitment. In 1993, Meyer and Allen proved that three components model could be applied to career commitment. Carson and Bedeian (1994) constructed measurement of career commitment. It included 12 items and three dimensions: 1) career identification, a close emotional association with one's career. 2) career resilience, resisting career disruption in the face of adversity 3) career planning, determining one's developmental needs and establishing a career plan.

### **2.3 Job content Plateau and Career Commitment**

Many studies have been stated that career plateau was significantly negative related to organizational commitment (Chen & Li, 2011; Lapalme, Tremblay, & Simard, 2009; Heilman, Holt, & Rilovick, 2008; Jung & Tak, 2008; McCleese & Eby, 2006; Lee, 2003; Nachbabauer & Riedal, 2002; Choy & Savery, 1999; Lemire, Sabs, & Gagnon, 1999; Allen Poteet, & Russell, 1998; Chay, Aryee, & Chew, 1995). Heilman, Holt, and Rilovick (2008) described that career plateau was positively related to turnover intention. Because employees view career plateau as hindrance from development and promotion in the organization, they with higher career plateau had lower commitment to the organization. Choy and Savery (1999) explored the relationships among employees' levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and the plateauing phenomenon. This study shows that plateaued employees had lower loyalty to the organization and less favorable view of the organization. Hence, employees with high career plateau will express lower organization commitment. Lapalme, Tremblay and Simard (2009) examined the relationship between career plateau and organization commitment. In this study, they identified the direct link between career plateau and affective commitment to the organization. The result showed that when employees faced career plateau feel less committed to their organizations.

Regarding the dimensions of career plateau, the result is not consistent. McCleese (2006) investigated that job content plateaued is negatively associated with organizational commitment in the sample of 1708 from 76 organizations. However, job content plateaued employees had greater organizational commitment under the condition they were not also exercising a hierarchical plateau. Employees believe that they will move upward to obtain the

opportunity to higher position. Also, their jobs will become more challengeable than current position. However, Nachbabauer and Riedal (2002) described that job content plateau is negatively related to affective commitment but positively related to continuance commitment in the sample of 165 faculty and 77 teachers. Moreover, it is not significant among objective structural plateau, affective commitment, and continuance commitment. Because the employees thought they have not ready for advanced job, they feel satisfied due to their ability limitation at doing their current job.

Some literatures supported that career mobility will increase employees' commitment to the organization (Grusky,1966 ; Gaertner & Nollen, 1989). The career mobility was defined as promotion from first position you work in the organization. Grusky (1966) obtained a survey on 1649 managers of the large single enterprise in the United Stated. The results showed that the more employees promoted to the higher positions, the more they received the rewards from organization. The more employees received the rewards, the higher they express commitment to the organization. Gaertner and Nollen (1989) stated that employees believed that if the company provides a long-term development opportunity for employees, they will express higher commitment to the organization.

According to the literature, the hypothesis 1 is conducted as follows:

H1. There is a significant negative relationship between job content plateau and career commitment.

## **2.4 Self-efficacy**

The concept of self-efficacy originated from Bandura's social cognitive theory in 1977. It refers to individual inside belief or expectation in accomplishing tasks or performing adequately in particular situation (Bandura, 1977a). Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as "People's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy was associated with social learning theory which explained the human behavior model in terms of interaction among cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinations. Psychological procedure stressed that how much effort expend and how long it is sustained when a person face difficulties and obstacles (Bandura, 1977b). Self-efficacy is associated with behavioral change (Bandura & Adam, 1977). Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) indicated that self-efficacy is the

belief that one can perform difficult tasks or cope with obstacles in various domains of human functioning. It refers four aspects which are goal setting, investment, persistence in face of barriers and recovery from setbacks.

## **2.5 Moderating role of self-efficacy**

Literature supported that self-efficacy serves as moderator between personality factors and career interest (Nauta ,2004). Personality factors refers to Big Five personality factors which are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Career interest is patterns of likes, dislikes, and indifferences with respect to career activities and occupations. Self-efficacy interacts with personality factors on career interest. It showed that different sides on self-efficacy. Career plateau has been influenced by various psychological factors people usually suffer in their working conditions. For example, Feldman and Weitz (1988) noted that employees with high growth need strength are inclined to be motivated to pursue and accept new chances on the job. Hence, those employees experienced less career plateau than others. If people with high growth need strength, they will express greater desire to encourage themselves, to develop their new capability, and to take more challenge (Alderfer, 1972). Vardi (1980) discovered that internal locus of control employees tend to experience more career mobility on the sample of non-supervisory workers. Employees with high internal locus of control will express high career mobility and be active to obtain opportunities in the organization. Locus of control had a clear influence on career oriented behavior, and this construct has specific psychological properties which show that it influences perceptions of job mobility requirements and opportunities. Moreover, the employees with internal locus of control are inclined to plan their career development if they do not suffer from situational constraints of the organization and moved upwards in the organization. Near (1980) stated that the individual factors influence on career plateau. If the person lacks the motivation, aspiration and ability to move up further, he or she will reach career plateau. Orpen (1983) described that career plateau is linked to career disillusionment in the sample of 326 managers in the middle position of companies. Career disillusionment represents the regrets of joining the company, frustration, and unhappiness in their jobs. If employees face long cessation of upward movement cessation, they will express lower mental health as self-esteem, depression and anxiety.

Armstrong-Stassen (2008) noted that the personal characteristics had a stronger association with job content plateau. Employees with high learning self-efficacy would express low job content plateau. They regarded work as important part of their life and believed that they had the ability to learn and develop new skills in order to overcome job content plateau. Besides, Armstrong-Stassen (2008) also indicated that people with higher learning self-efficacy had positive perceptions of career potential and attitudes in their job. Based on the above statement, many psychology factors influence on people's career plateau. Hence, it is assumed that people catch higher self-efficacy will lower job content plateau.

Many studies have been stated that self-efficacy is significant positive to career commitment (Aremu, 2005; Adio & Popoola, 2010; Niu ,2010). Niu (2010) noted that there was positive correlation between self-efficacy and career commitment in the samples of 1025 employees in foodservice industry. They found that employees with high level of self-efficacy had higher level of career commitment. Besides, employees with higher self-efficacy are not only at the higher needs level, but also they are more motivated to pursue self-growth, self-realization, and be willing to plan and carry out their career activities . For such employees, they will express high self-fulfillment.

Klassen and Chiu (2011) indicated that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and occupational commitment in the sample of 434 practicing teachers. The result illustrated that teachers with high self-efficacy are more committed to the profession when they feel confident in their performance and controlling the teaching situation. They expressed greater confidence to their career.

Based on these studies, it is assumed that job content plateaued workers with high self-efficacy will express higher career commitment than those with lower self-efficacy. Hypothesis 2 is proposed.

Hypothesis 2. Self-efficacy negatively moderates the relationship between job content plateau and career commitment. Specifically, the higher self-efficacy, the stronger effect of job content plateau on career commitment.

### III. Methodology

#### 3.1 Sample and Data Procedure

Data were gathered from 235 business students. Work experience is an essential issue in the study. Business students who have at least one year of working experience were qualified to answer questionnaires. Self-reported questionnaires were distributed during their business related classes. From total 455 distributed questionnaires, 235 were returned resulting in a response rate of 52%.

Table 3 shows the sample's demographics. In this study, interval of age from 31 to 40 (46%), work experience from 11 to 20 (45%), and year salary from 500,001 to 1,000,000 (46%) occupied most percentage of sample.

Table 3 Sample's demographics (n=235)

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Less than 30 years	37	16
31-40	107	46
41-50	71	30
Over 51	20	8
Work experience		
Less than 5 years	23	10
5-10	52	22
11-20	105	45
Over 21	55	23
Year Salary (NT dollars)		
Under 500,000	40	17
500,001-1,000,000	108	46
1000,001-1500,000	57	24
Above 150,000	28	12
Missing	2	

#### 3.2 Instrumentation

*Job content plateau.* The 6-item job content plateauing scale was adapted by Allen, Russell, Poteet and Dobbins in 1999. The typical items is "My job responsibilities have increase significantly". The response categories ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Cronbach's coefficient Alpha reliabilities of job content plateau in this study was 0.87.

*Career commitment.* This study will use Carson and Bedeian's (1994) Career Commitment Measure (CCM) to assess three components of career commitment. There are

12 items divided into three dimensions: career identity with four items, career planning with four items and career resilience with four items. Career identity refers to establishing a close emotional association with one's career, and a typical item is "My line of work/career field is an important part of who I am". Career planning indicates the concept of determining developmental needs and setting career goals, and a typical item is "I have created a plan for my development in this line of work/career field". Career resilience represents a person who resists career disruption in the face of adversity and in sub dimension of career identity, and a typical item is "The discomforts associated with my line of work/career field sometimes seem too great". This scale employs five point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree). Cronbach's coefficient Alpha reliabilities of career commitment in this study was 0.86.

*Self-efficacy.* General Self-Efficacy (GSE) scale is utilized to assess self-efficacy. General Self-Efficacy (GSE) scale was initially developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem in 1995. This scale has a total of 10 items, and typical items are "It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals". And "Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations". The scale used seven-point Likert scale (1= Strongly not true to 7 = Strongly true). Cronbach's coefficient Alpha reliabilities of career commitment in this study was 0.86.

## IV. Result

Table 4.1 presents the the means, standard deviations, and variables correlations. All variables were significantly correlated with each other. Job content plateau was significantly and negatively correlated with career commitment ( $r = -0.38, p < 0.01$ ) and self-efficacy ( $r = -0.16, p < 0.01$ ). Career commitment was significantly and positively correlated with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.25, p < 0.01$ ).

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics and correlations

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Age	39.4	7.9						
2 Work experience	15.4	7.7	.92**					
3 Year salary	4.1	1.6	.45**	.46**				
4 Job content plateau	2.1	0.7	-.04	-.07	-.21**	(0.87)		
5 Self-efficacy	3.8	0.5	.04	.53	.13	-.16*	(0.86)	
6 Career commitment	4.8	0.9	.15*	.20**	.20**	-.38**	.25**	(0.86)

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Cronbach's alpha are in parentheses. N=235

The effects of job content plateau on career commitment variables are presented in Table 4.2. Hypothesis 1 predicted that job content plateau was negatively related to career commitment. In the result of regression, the Model 2 was significant (adjusted  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .12$ ,  $F = 13.13$ ,  $\Delta F = 33.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Job content plateau had a negative and statistically significant effect on career success ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $t = -5.77^{***}$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result supported for the Hypothesis 1.

Table 4.2 Hierarchical regression results of the effect of job content plateau on career commitment.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
	$\beta$	$\beta$
<i>Step 1: Control variables</i>		
Age	-.31 <sup>+</sup>	-.25
Work Experience	.42 <sup>+</sup>	.38 <sup>+</sup>
Year Salary	.14 <sup>+</sup>	.06
<i>Step 2: Main Effect</i>		
Job Content Plateau		-.35 <sup>***</sup>
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.19
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.17
$\Delta R^2$		.12
F	5.61 <sup>**</sup>	13.13 <sup>***</sup>
$\Delta F$		33.31 <sup>***</sup>

Notes: <sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . N=235

Table 4.3 Hierarchical regression results of the effect of self-efficacy and job content plateau on career commitment.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
<i>Step 1: Control variables</i>			
Age	-.31 <sup>+</sup>	-.23	-.13
Work Experience	.42 <sup>+</sup>	.37 <sup>+</sup>	.21
Year Salary	.14 <sup>+</sup>	.04	.04
<i>Step 2: Main Effects</i>			
Job Content Plateau		-.33 <sup>***</sup>	.32 <sup>***</sup>
Self-efficacy		.18 <sup>**</sup>	.17 <sup>**</sup>
<i>Step 3: Interaction</i>			

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Self-efficacy x Job content plateau			-.12*
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.22	.23
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.20	.21
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.15	.01
F	5.61***	12.65***	11.36***
ΔF		21.68***	4.08*

Notes: +  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . N=235

Hypothesis 2 stated that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between job content plateau and career commitment. As shown in Model 3 (Table 4.3), there is a significant interaction between self-efficacy and job content plateau for career commitment ( $\beta = -0.12$ ,  $t = -2.02^*$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

## V. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among job content plateau, Self-efficacy, and career commitment. The results showed that after taking control variables, age, work experience, and year salary into account, there was a significant negative relationship between job content plateau and career commitment. Besides, self-efficacy did negatively moderate the relationship between job content plateau and career commitment. The results of this study confirmed the negative significant effects of job content plateau on career commitment in line with the results of past studies (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989; Nachbabauer & Riedal, 2002 ).

This study examined the interaction effect between job content plateau and self-efficacy on career commitment. The empirical evidence showed that self-efficacy negatively moderated the influence of job content plateau on career commitment. The relationship between job content plateau and career commitment was weaker when self-efficacy was high. This finding is consistent with previous study (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Niu, 2010) As shown in Figure 4.1, the result shows that for those people with high self-efficacy, job content plateau was not strongly related to career commitment. Whereas for those with low self-efficacy, job content plateau was negatively related to career commitment. In other words, people with a higher self-efficacy had better career commitment than those with a lower self-efficacy.

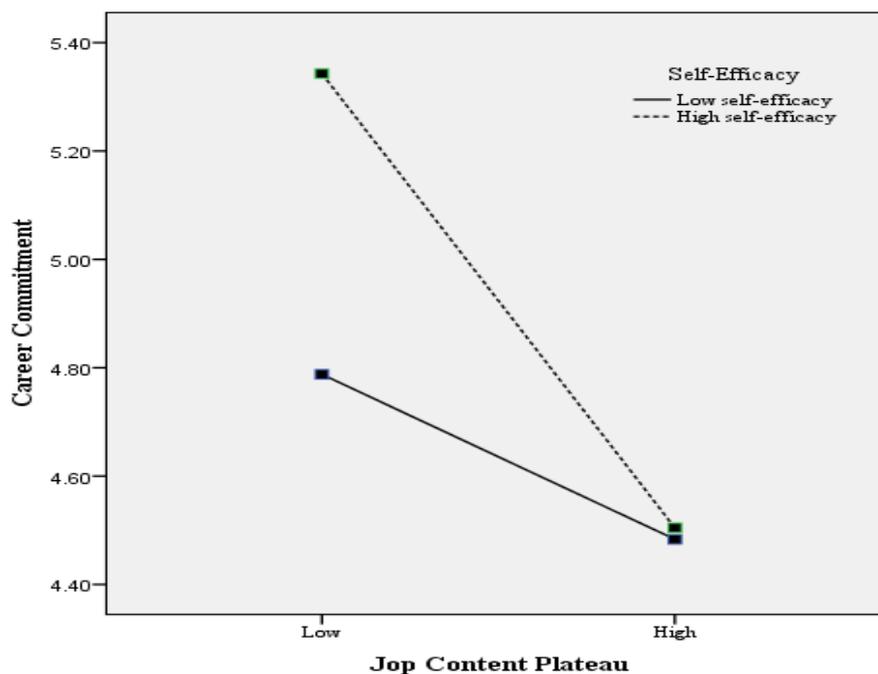


Figure. 4.1 The Interaction effect of Self-Efficacy and Job Content Plateau on Career Commitment

## VI. Limitation and Implication

There were a number of strengths, and limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting these results. First, on the concern of the statistical conclusion validity, the scales were designed to be rated by 7 Likert-point scale and 5 Likert -point scale. Besides, some items were reverse items. These methods could avoid common method bias (Crompton & Wagner, 1994). Nevertheless, although the study applies these measurements, the common method bias might exist. Second, this study target samples are business students. This specific sample group could not generalize to other job positions and industry based on particular traits in business students.

Understanding the factors that affect employees' career commitment is important for organizations seeking to develop motivated and competent workforces. This study focused on the effects of job content plateau and self-efficacy on career commitment. Job content plateau was found to predict career commitment. The study also examined the moderating role that self-efficacy played in decreasing the effects of job content plateau on career commitment. When people are in the organization, they pursue highly value job variety, challenge work, and profession development. When these were not present in their careers, they would feel bored or disillusioned with their job (Smith-Ruig, 2009). Regarding negative outcome if job content plateau, organizations could enhance employees' self-efficacy. Thus, job content plateaued

employees would experience higher career commitment. In addition, if the company provides a long-term development opportunity for employees, they will express higher commitment to the organization. Organization could remain competitive workforce.

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