

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

CAREER PLATEAUNG EFFECT ON EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Mario Souheil Dib for Master In Human Resources Management
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Title: Career Plateauing Effect on Employee Engagement

In general, one of the most essential assets of companies and organizations are employees and human capital. There is a large interest in studying the employees' behavior towards work and companies, or more specifically employee engagement. Of particular aspect of employee engagement, this study will explore the correlation and effect of career plateauing on employee engagement. Considering the current difficult Lebanese market economic conditions where companies have lean organizations and structures, employees have less opportunities to evolve in their career which might lead to a bulk of employees facing career plateauing. Career plateauing can have harmful effects on the employee himself and the organization.

In this paper we will research the different impact that career plateauing can have on employee engagement in the local Lebanese context. More specifically, we will explore the engagement of career-plateaued employees within Holcim Lebanon, a cement company in Lebanon. This project will study the relationship between career plateauing, recognition, and employee engagement in order to provide the company with a set of recommendations and actions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the most essential assets of companies and organizations are employees and human capital. There is a large interest in studying the employees' behavior towards work and companies, or more specifically employee engagement. It has always been said that companies able to unlock the hidden secret of employee engagement can reach results and profits beyond what they dream of (Swarnalatha and Prasanna, 2013).

According to Kahn (1992), in the new competitive business environment filled with mergers, acquisitions, and organizational reductions, companies are looking for fully engaged workers and personnel, because they can directly benefit from such employee's presence to produce better results, save money, and create new ideas.

Of particular aspect of employee engagement, this study will explore the relationship between career plateauing and employee engagement. Considering the poor talent retention and the difficult Lebanese market economic conditions where companies have glass ceiling in family businesses, unclear career path, uncompetitive pay and lean organizations, employees have less opportunities to evolve in their career, which might lead to a bulk of employees facing career plateauing (UNDP report, 2014).

Career plateauing can have harmful effects on the employee himself and the organization (Lapalme, Tremblay & Simard, 2009). Changes in behavior such as absenteeism, social withdrawal, psychological distress, lower performance are some effects of career plateauing that affects negatively work teams and increases turnover rate.

In this paper we will research the different impact that career plateauing can have on employee engagement in the local Lebanese context. More specifically, we will explore the engagement of career-plateaued employees within Holcim Lebanon, the largest cement company in Lebanon.

This project will study the relationship between career plateauing, recognition, and employee engagement, beginning with a literature review, followed by defining the research objectives and hypotheses, and the research methodology.

CHAPTER TWO

PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Career plateauing

Career plateauing is the feeling of an employee when he or she has reached a level where career development is not possible. Researchers started studying this phenomenon in the 1970's, at a time where employees used to be loyal to the same company and organization for a very long period. During years of economic expansion, this phenomenon was less noticed since psychological contracts collapsed and career mobility increased. However, during instability and recessions where licensing, restructuring, and merger & acquisitions govern the market, employees seek security by staying within the same organization, thus they are faced with less possibilities for advancement in the company (Godshalk & Fender, 2015).

Career plateauing tends to be more or less noticed depending on generations. For example, baby boomers (born before 1963) sought job security and structured work that lead them to stay in the same organization and reach a career plateau; in comparison, millennials (born between 1980-1995) are known to be much more enthusiastic and in need of change, with high entrepreneurial spirit, that has driven them to change employers more often in search of a more fulfilling and meaningful job (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015).

Other literature describes career plateau as being related to people's age and not specific to a particular generation. For instance, an employee in his twenties is always ready to change jobs to gain more experience and find a meaningful job. Whereas those

in their sixties are less interested in change, feel exhausted from work, and started preparing for their retirement (Gratton & Scott, 2016).

Furthermore, in recent years with advancement in technology, redefinition of jobs towards being more challenging and constantly demanding, plateauing in a career is not a top priority of HR departments in organizations. In today's world where companies and employees need to keep up with the continuous demanding external and internal environment, in terms of clients' needs or even new tools and techniques, the people seem to have new content added to their job leading them to feel less plateaued. From an HR perspective, the priority has shifted from plateau and career management to change management with an urgency to deal with continuous change and help employees embrace it.

Much has also been written to describe individual careers no longer bound to certain organizations or even professions, leading to a new concept of boundary-less careers that would push the plateauing concept to be obsolete. A boundary-less career is open to physical and psychological mobility. The employees and especially younger generations are pioneers in entrepreneurship and thus are taking into their own hands the responsibility of evolving their career path and would not wait anymore for organizations to push them further. (Goshalk & Fender, 2015).

Again, looking at the fact that several organizations have gone through restructuring in the past years further to the financial crash of 2008, employees see the chances of their advancement or progress in career ladder reduced, due to flattened hierarchy. The fact that fewer senior positions exists, reduces the opportunity for upward movement. Thus, more employees reach a point where advancement is very

low. Therefore, career plateauing phenomena emerged again (Lapalme, Tremblay & Simard, 2009).

B. Types of career plateauing and their drivers

Career plateauing is described as effective or ineffective based on the employees' performance: Effective plateauing, or “solid citizens”, is high performance employees who face low promotion possibilities; and ineffective plateauing, or “deadwood”, describes employees who are poor performers and face low promotion opportunity (Ferance & al., 1977, in Corner, 2014).

Later researchers such as Bardwick (1986) and Diffy (2000) have categorized career plateauing into three different perspectives:

- Content plateauing describes an individual that is no longer satisfied and motivated by his current job content, thus reaching a level where a person has mastered all the tasks of his job, leading to a feeling of lack of fulfillment or even routine.
- Structural plateauing where an employee has little possibility of vertical movement within his company. This lack of vertical movement could be limited due to few higher positions because of economic conditions, restructuring, and complexity of career path due to nepotism or over staffing leading to a lot of competition.
- A personnel plateauing is a state of an employee who is no longer motivated or enthusiastic for future advancement due to personal reasons whether familial, medical or work-life balance related (Corner, 2014).

All the above perspectives are the result either of less promotion opportunities within a company, since vertical movement is similar to a pyramid with less

possibilities each time we move higher, or personal decisions where a person can no longer evolve due to limitation of time, family or life-work balance considerations.

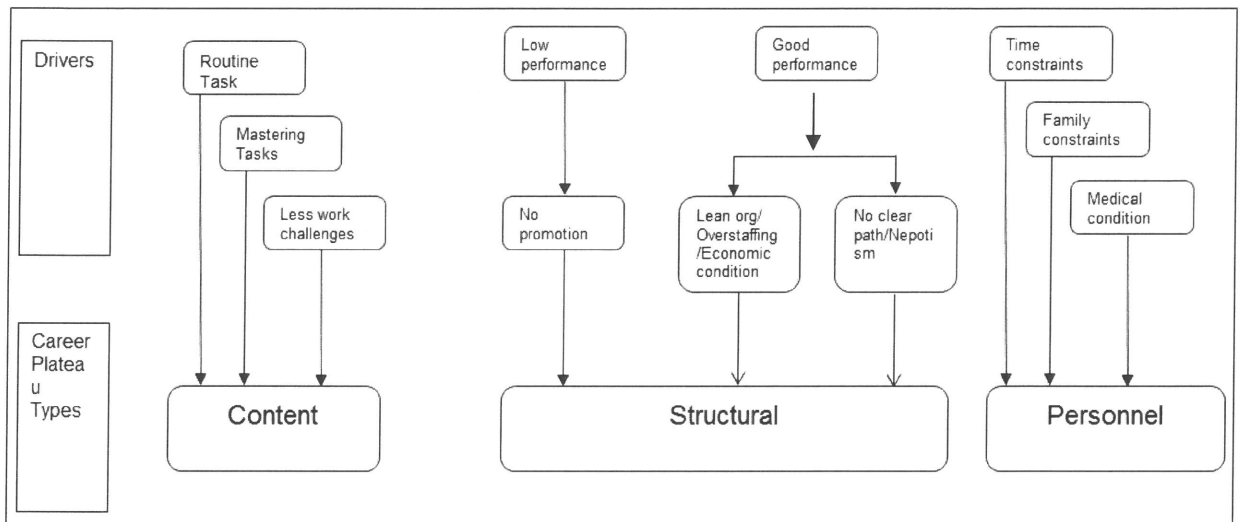


Fig. 2.1. Model of drivers of career plateauing (Summarized from reading from Corner, 2014)

C. Career plateauing outcomes

Career plateauing can have several harmful effects on the organization and employees. Plateauing affects negatively employee satisfaction at work, commitment to company, work performance, productivity, and employee engagement (Lapalme, Tremblay & Simard, 2009). Furthermore, the behavior of employees changes, or can be manifested by increased absenteeism, social withdrawal, and higher rates of turnover in the organization (Corner, 2014). As stated by Godshalk & Fender (2015), Ettington (1992) also found a negative correlation between career plateauing and motivation.

Thus if career plateauing is left unnoticed or untended by managers, it could lead to the decline of overall company performance in the end. Career plateaued

employees tend to underperform in their duties when there is little or no support or recognition from management.

In this project, we are mostly interested in studying the relationship between career plateauing and employee engagement in a specific local company.

D. Definition of employee engagement

Researching an exact and clear definition of employee engagement can lead to various ways of interpreting it. Furthermore, the definition of employee engagement might be confused with several other HR related concepts (Bhatnagar & Biswas, 2010). The lack of distinction can occur between employee engagement and motivation or employee engagement and job satisfaction, which are different concepts although they are interrelated. Crossover among these concepts can be confusing, since engagement contains many elements of job satisfaction and motivation but the constructs do not completely overlap.

Employee engagement being a complex concept influenced by many factors from organization culture, managerial style or even trust and respect between employees; researchers cannot be aligned on a single definition of the concept but tend to describe it by very broad vision statements.

Some critics and researchers highlighted the idea that employee engagement is not a concept by itself that can be defined by a direct measure. Rather a crossover of several other concepts that is highly interrelated in the work environment, such as work engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. All of them being a description of several forms of commitment used to describe the employee engagement (Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2013).

Kahn (1990) defines engagement as the extent to which people involve themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their role both in work and in relation with colleagues. He clarifies that personal engagement varies, depending on three psychological conditions related to benefit, meaningfulness, and safety (Kahn, 1990).

In comparing Kahn's definition to other definitions of employee engagement, it is noted that Kahn relates engagement to three dimensions: physical, cognitive, and emotional. Whereas Gallup organization relates it to single emotional dimension by defining employee engagement as people that work with passion and have a strong connection to their company, and help improve the organization's performance (as cited in Swarnalatha and Prasanna, 2013).

It is highlighted as well in Gibbon's (2006) definition, the emotional dimension of employee engagement that is not only towards the company, but also towards all companies' elements and components: "employees who have a heightened connection to their organization, supervisor and coworkers, and who make additional effort in their work are considered engaged" (as cited in Thompson, 2009, page 17).

All the previous definitions describe the attitude of an engaged employee towards his organization depending on satisfaction from work conditions, or arrangements offered by employer. Whereas for Macey and Schneider (2008) they describe engagement by how an employee is engaged personally, irrespective of the specific company or employer arrangements and conditions. -Macey and Schneider present a three-dimensional model of engagement based on:

- Trait engagement (Attitude): that is directly related to personality attributes. For example if an employee has positive views on life, has a proactive personality, he would be more engaged in his work.
- State engagement (Company conditions): is associated with how a person feels energized by offering him more empowerment, involvement in border tasks, which leads to work commitment.
- Behavior engagement (Outcome): is how a person shows his commitment by being proactive and highly driven by personal initiative and showing organizational citizenship behavior.

Others define engagement from a company's perspective. Shaw (2005) describes engagement as shifting employee potential to performance contributing in company success (as cited by Swarnalatha and Prasanna, 2013). It is considered that by utilizing the right engagement tools, companies can influence employee performance. Moreover, with better performance, organizations can improve their profitability. Therefore, in this definition, the core element is the influence of employee engagement on company's performance.

Engagement has also been defined in terms of its antonym - burnout. Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined engagement as the exact opposite of burnout in a work environment, the first being a positive psychological condition and the other the negative opposite pole (as cited in Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). More specifically burnout is the condition when a person is exhausted mentally and physically due to over stress caused by work related circumstances.

To understand further employee engagement definition or concept, it is necessary to see how it is measured and what are the drivers, antecedents and outcomes of engagement.

E. Measuring employee engagement

There has been always a need to measure employee engagement due to the important effect that it can have on an organization. Two of the models found in the literature are explained below:

Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) measures engagement as an opposite of burnout. Burnout is defined by a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion due to prolonged stress condition. Lack of interest and lack of productivity are signs of burnout. The MBI considers the three dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficiency. This measurement has been critiqued by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) since if an employee is not burned out this does not imply that he is engaged (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003).

A more widely used measure for engagement is Utrecht's Work Engagement scale that measures engagement based on three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Fong and Ho, 2015). Vigor is defined as resilience and effort invested in work during times of difficulty, dedication refers to having a sense of enthusiasm and involvement in one's own work, while absorption measures how attached and concentrated is a person on his work. UWES looks more valid since it can reflect a measurement of the engagement concept and not just a presence or not of engagement as in MBI. Furthermore, research has shown that the UWES survey has an internal reliability of $\alpha = .80$ and strong validity coefficients for the three scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Due to various engagement definitions, when a company needs to measure this concept, it will be best served if HR managers or leaders research the proper definition

that relates well with their company's strength, weaknesses and history, to be able to choose the best survey that reflects it (Swarnalatha and Prasanna, 2013).

F. Factors influencing employee engagement

Employee engagement has many factors of influence that can enhance it or have a negative effect on it. This section will explore the variables that directly and indirectly mediate or moderate employee engagement.

Gebauer (2007) noted several factors such as, leadership role, development opportunities, organizational culture, and reputation that influence engagement (as cited in Thompson, 2009). So if an employee feels he is in a company that promotes a career development culture, that offers learning opportunities, and has close mentoring by leaders, he tends to feel more engaged. Other antecedents that affect positively the level of engagement are company performance. Since good performance offers a sense of security and stability to employees (Thompson, 2009). Other factors might affect engagement from an employee point of view such as communication and trust with senior leadership. Trust and open communication encourage teams to share their opinions, and this will influence positively the feeling of being valued. Furthermore, employee benefits is another way to let them feel valued and treated, thus more engaged (Pegg, 2009). Other predictors of employee engagement can be noted such as sense of justice within a company, and other psychological contract such as HR policies, job definition that defines company's culture, to which employees relate (Bhatnagar and Biswas, 2010).

More specifically in this study we will be analyzing a specific factor, career plateauing and its direct influence on employee engagement.

G. Possible outcomes of employee engagement

According to Bhatnagar and Biswas, 2010 there is a positive effect between engaged employee and their level of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. So a highly engaged employee tends to feel that the company interest is equivalent to his own interest, leading him to perform voluntary positive actions reaching beyond his limited job duties. This entire relation contributes to higher firm performance, which in return affect positively employee engagement as stated earlier (Bhatnagar and Biswas, 2010).

Employee engagement has as well a positive outcome towards retention and motivation that leads to an increase in the companies' productivity and company income (Thompson, 2009). Bhatnagar (2007) reported that dramatic differences in bottom-line results are noticed when comparing companies with high versus low engaged employees (as cited in Bhatnagar and Biswas, 2010).

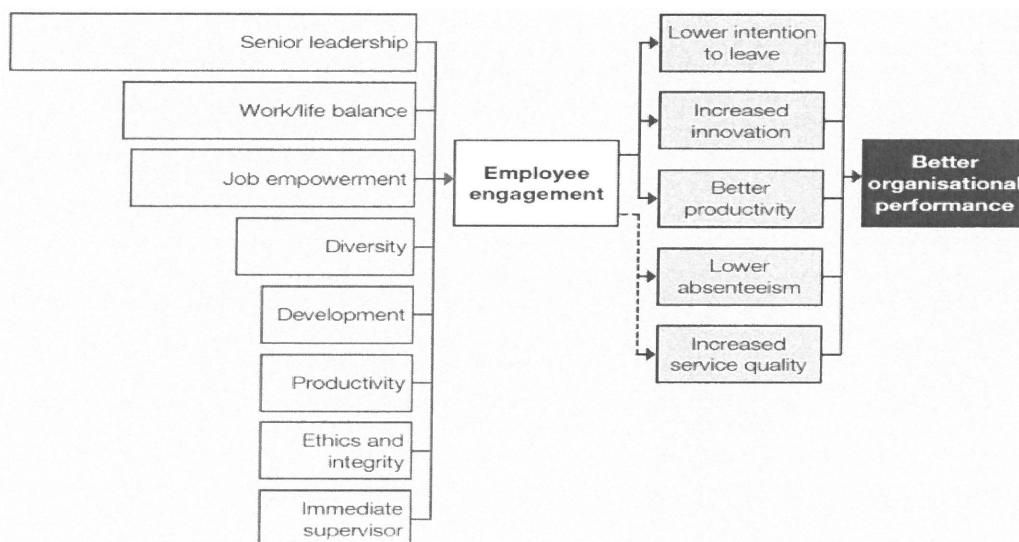


Fig. 2.2. Model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement

Source: Annual report 2015, Public Sector Commission of the Government of West Australia

H. Definition of recognition

In the current study, recognition could affect the relation of the two concepts that we previously defined: career plateauing and employee engagement. Recognition could be affecting the two variables. The relationship is operationalized in detail in the research question. In this section, we will explore the definition of recognition.

Employee recognition is composed of all tangible outcomes or intangible resources provided by the organization in exchange or in return for employees' effort. Recognition could be provided morally or by social exchange for appreciation and can be provided financially by bonus or pay increase for example. In our study, we will focus on moral and social recognition. Recognition could have a circular positive effect relationship on employee's motivation and engagement.

Recognition involves several dimensions:

- Individual: by treating employees respectfully and giving them a feeling that they matter.
- Achievement: by celebrating a tangible outcome related to work.
- Work performance: by highlighting "how" an employee performs his job.
- Dedication: recognizing employee's commitment, loyalty, and effort. (Cannon, 2015).

Appraisal and feedback as a recognition tool can also have a positive effect on employee performance (Tran and Zeckhauser, 2012, in Kosfald, Neckermann & Yand, 2017). Mentoring or coaching as another type of moral recognition has been found to have an effect on the relationship between career plateauing, affective commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intention (Lentz & Allen, 2009). Thus, this highlights the role

of supervisors and managers in improving employee status and conditions through putting more effort in developing their coaching relations.

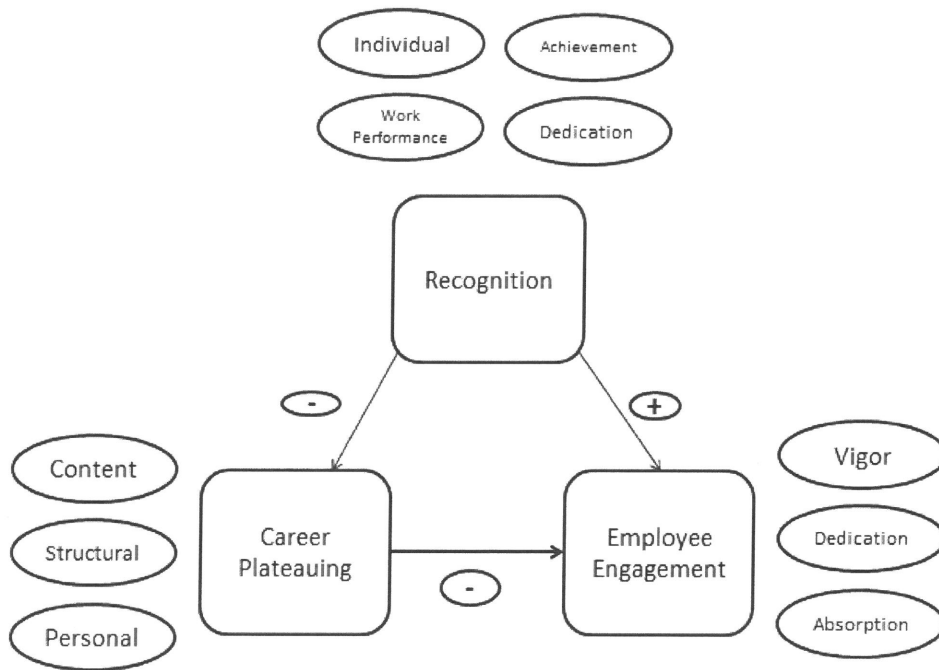


Fig. 2.3. Model of career plateauing, employee engagement, and recognition

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH QUESTION

A. Research Question

The aim of this project is to study the effects of career plateauing on employee engagement within Holcim Lebanon, and the role of recognition in that relationship.

Holcim Lebanon was the first cement company to be established in Lebanon back in 1929. It was cooperation between the Maronite patriarchate, who offered the land in Chekka with the purpose of keeping the local Christians in their northern communities, and Holderbank, the Swiss cement factory owned at that time by the Schmidheiny family. Holcim group became a French-Swiss group in 2015 with the merger of Lafarge (France) and Holcim (Switzerland), resulting in a presence in more than 90 countries with 115,000 employees around the world. The local company employs around 300 persons directly in the Northern Province and more than 1,000 individuals through subcontracted activities. One of the main aims of Holcim Lebanon is to be a trusted partner in the community and to be the most attractive employer by providing proper work environment and a respectful workplace.

Considering Holcim Lebanon, its lean organization and its geographical location in the north, where multinational employers are rare (only 2 multinational Air Liquide with 73 employees and Mondi papers with 38 employees exists in the area), we notice that people joining this company tend to stay employed, until they retire at the age of 64. This explains a turnover level of zero. The loyalty of the employees towards Holcim is due to the lack of employment opportunities in the north region within the same

benefit, conditions, and stability. As stated by the World Bank report, 53 percent of north Lebanon population is inactive. “And among those who are working in north Lebanon, the vast majorities are in poor quality, low productivity jobs working in enterprises of less than 10 employees.” (Habib, 2017).

Holcim Lebanon employs 280 persons split between 50 white-collar jobs and 230 blue-collar jobs. Holcim today has a very lean organizational structure since operations shifted from 700 employees before 2000 to 280 after 2001 due to a massive restructuring. The percentage of female employees is low, at 7%. The split of employee’s origin by region is 80% from north versus 20% from other Lebanese regions. The age repartition curve is centered at 49-50 years old with a bulk of approximately 100 employees leaving in 10 years, so the organization is considered old with less fresh recruits. The average years of service or tenure in the company are 20 years. Moreover, turnover rate is essentially 0%, with intentional departures at one departure every five years for people below the age of 64. As for the number of new positions, it is at the rate of two positions every five years.

Table 3.1. Holcim demographics data

	Men	Women
Total Headcount	261	19
Number of top managers	5	1
Number of senior managers	8	1
Number of managers	30	9
Number of junior managers	65	8
Number of non-managers	153	0
Employees under the age of 30	12	5
Employees between 30 and 50	103	9
Employees over 50	146	5

Due to what has been mentioned earlier, we notice that certain employees, specifically white collars, within Holcim might be facing career plateauing thus leading to a lower level of their engagement and less outcome to their teams and their organizations. The purpose of this study is to set study the nature of this relationship, and to follow with recommendations and improvement actions that Holcim can implement to reduce the negative effects of career plateauing.

B. Specific research hypotheses

This study will explore the relationship between career plateauing and employee engagement. As stated in the literature review, career plateauing tends to negatively affect employee satisfaction, commitment, productivity and work performance. That leads to a direct effect on employee engagement.

Recognition could be considered as a variable that affects career plateauing

In hypothesis 1, we will examine the negative correlation between career plateauing and the three dimension of work engagement:

H1a: A negative relationship is predicted between career plateauing and vigor, so when career plateau exists, the less vigor is shown by the employee

In H1a, we will explore the correlation between career plateauing and vigor. Vigor being the level of energy and mental resilience that is provided by employee while working. Therefore, H1a predicts that whenever an employee reaches a career plateau, he will be less interested in his work and this will be noted through the vigor dimension of employee engagement. So all aspects of vigor such as positive feeling, physical endurance, emotional energy, and cognitive dynamism will tend to be less exhibited; as an individual hits a career plateau, his evaluation of the work will tend to be negative.

H1b: A negative relationship is predicted between career plateauing and dedication, whereby when an employee reaches plateau he tends to show less dedication to his work

In H1b, we will explore the correlation between Career Plateauing and dedication. Dedication is the extent to which an employee finds meaning in his work and stays enthusiastic about it. Usually a dedicated employee spreads in the organization several visible signs of passion for their own work, positive attitude towards colleagues and clients, deploys their own initiative at work, and they are always present physically and mentally. Whereas the signs described for career plateaued employee's shows less presence or less internal drive to affect the work, because they are bored or no more interested in what they do. Therefore, we consider that whenever career plateau increases, the impact on dedication tends to be negative.

H1c: A negative relationship is predicted between career plateauing and absorption, whereby an employee at plateau level tends to be exhibit less absorption to his work

In H1c, we will explore the correlation between career plateauing and absorption.

Absorption is the cognitive measure of engagement; it represents the time spent by an employee fully concentrated on the job. It is a direct representation of engagement and even satisfaction in a job, since the person is happily fulfilling his own job to a limit where he feels time passes quickly and he cannot even detach himself from his own job. Therefore, we consider that when an employee is plateaued, he is less interested in his job and he does not exhibit any attitude or feeling of attachment to the work.

In hypothesis 2 we will examine the positive effect of managerial recognition on engagement of career plateaued employees. The difficulty with career plateauing is that companies does not have in hand immediate tools that can help them in reducing or terminating this phenomena. The presence of such tools would mean a continuous

growing organization capable of fulfilling all the career growth each individual is looking for. On the other hand exploring the effect of positive human relations such as recognition could potentially help the employee in accepting his current job conditions while feeling more positive about it. This in fact can be affective response since the person had the feeling of being valuable to his manager and organization. Therefore, we will investigate in this hypothesis two dimension of recognition.

H2a: Individual recognition positively affects career plateaued employees, whereby the more individual recognition an employee receives, the less likely they will experience career plateauing.

In H2a the individual recognition, such as the respect and the value shown by manager to employee and how it affects the employee engagement. Therefore, when the employee feels that his manager highlights his individual characteristics in a distinctive way, he realizes his value in the company, even if his current job is not giving him the value he is looking for. This could be a factor in reducing the plateau phenomena and its negative behaviors towards organization.

H2b: Work recognition positively affects career plateaued employees, whereby the more work recognition is shown to the employee, the less likely he will feel the plateau phenomena. Since the population of white collars in Holcim Lebanon in general is delivering proper results to the company, the recognition of their effort put into a certain work by celebrating the good results to the company, could be also a valid way to reduce the career plateauing phenomena.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODS

A. Participants

The total number of respondent reached 119 out of which 103 are usable and fully completed. The sample was predominantly male (56.3%) with an age repartition mainly between 32-42 bracket (40.8%). Most of the respondents are at Mid-Career level (48.5%) and have been in the same position between 1 to 3 years (35.9%). Table 1 illustrates the full demographics of the participants.

Table 4.1. Participant demographics (N = 103)

A.1	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	58	56.3
Female	45	43.7
Age		
22 – 32	37	35.9
32 – 42	42	40.8
42 – 52	13	12.6
52 – 64	11	10.7
Years in Position		
1 – 3 year	37	35.9
3 – 5 years	26	25.2
5 – 10 years	18	17.5
10+ years	22	21.4
Employee level		
Junior	17	16.5
Mid-Career	50	48.5
Senior	36	35

1. Measures

Three surveys were used to measure engagement, career plateauing, and recognition. All survey items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree.

a. Employee Engagement

Engagement is measured using Utrecht's Work Engagement Scale that covers the three sub-dimensions of vigor (*sample question: At my work, I feel bursting with energy*), dedication (*sample question: I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose*), and absorption (*sample question: Time flies when I am working*). Research has shown that the UWES survey has an internal reliability of $\alpha = .80$ and strong validity coefficients for the three scales (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

b. Career plateauing

Career plateauing is measured using the 12 items of Milliman (1992) (as cited in Lentz, 2004) and covers the content and structural plateauing with strong validity and internal reliability ($\alpha = .87$). From the list of question 21 until 32, the questions 21, 22, 24,25,26,28 and 30 have to be reverse-scored. Questions 21 until 26 measure content plateauing (*sample question: I expect to be constantly challenged in my job*) and questions 27 until 32 measure structural or hierarchal plateauing (*sample question: I expect to advance to a higher level in my company in the near future*).

c. Recognition

Recognition is measured using the scale developed and validated by Cannon, 2015 with an internal reliability ($\alpha = .97$). Recognition is measured using four factors: individual recognition, dedication, achievement, and work performance. Questions 33 to 43. Questions 33 till 35 measure individual recognition (*sample question: My personal well-being is important to my supervisor*), questions 36 till 38 measure achievement (*sample question: I receive congratulations from my supervisor when I reach specific goals*), questions 39 and 41 measure work performance (*sample question: My supervisor comments on the level of professionalism I exhibit through my work*), and questions 40,42 and 43 measure dedication(*sample question: My hard-work and dedication are noticed by my supervisor*).

The measure of each variable will be done by Likert likelihood scale ranging from 1 to 5. The full survey is provided in Appendix 1.

2. Procedure

After the approval of the organization (Holcim Lebanon) and the Institutional Review Board, the HR clerk sent the survey internally via email during the month of October 2017. All employees with internet access were invited to complete the online questionnaire through Lime survey. Out of the 300 employees of the company, 140 have emails and internet access.

Further to three email reminders spread over a period of three weeks, 64 employees took the survey. Out of which, 53 were usable and fully completed. There was a need to increase the sample to have reliable data. Moreover, the organization did not want to push further the employees by additional reminders in order to keep the

participation at free will. It has been agreed with the supervisor of the project to extend the sample out of the organization, since the topic is valid in any organization and any employee can complete the survey in order to reach a valid sample of 100 full responses.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

A. Results

All measures achieved the minimum reliability with Cronbach's alpha (coefficient of reliability) ($\alpha = .819$).

Since the survey was extended to employees out of Holcim due to the low respondent rate within Holcim, we did a comparison between the two groups Holcim respondent and non-Holcim respondent, using that 2-sample t-test. . The test showed that there was a significant difference between Holcim and Non-Holcim on the two dimensions: Engagement and Recognition, meaning that Holcim employees receive less recognition and are less engaged than non-Holcim employees. Meanwhile both groups are found to be similar in terms of their perceptions of career plateau (Table 3 and 4).

Table 5.1. Group statistics

	Holcim/Non Holcim	N	Mean	Std Dev.	Std Error Mean
ET	Holcim	41	3.57	.70	.11
	Non-Holcim	62	3.85	.62	.08
CPT	Holcim	41	2.78	.82	.13
	Non-Holcim	62	2.70	.82	.10
RT	Holcim	41	3.19	.92	.14
	Non-Holcim	62	3.73	.96	.12

Table 5.2. Independent samples test

		Sig. (2-tailed)
ET	Equal variance assumed	.035
CPT	Equal variance assumed	.594
RT	Equal variance assumed	.005

Group comparison conducted between career plateauing and years spent shows $F = 2.29$ with a significance $Sig. = .083$. In addition, the group comparison between Career Plateauing and age shows $F = 3.41$ with a significance $Sig. = .02$. Results shown on graph 1 and graph 2.

The group comparison purpose is used to study how a variable is treated (in this case career plateauing) in comparison to other groups of variables (age group or year spent group).

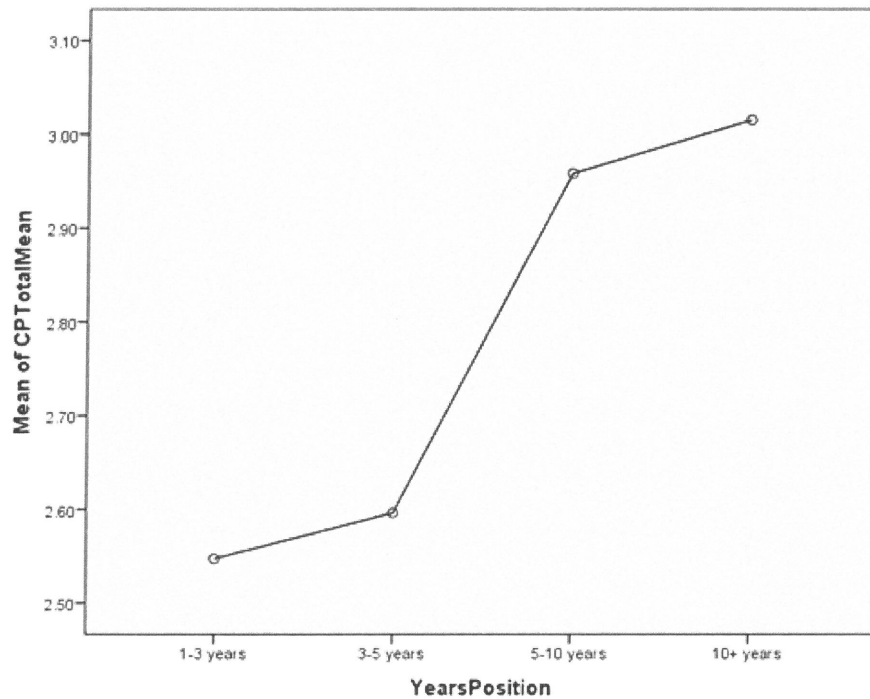


Fig. 5.1. Career plateauing and years spent group comparison

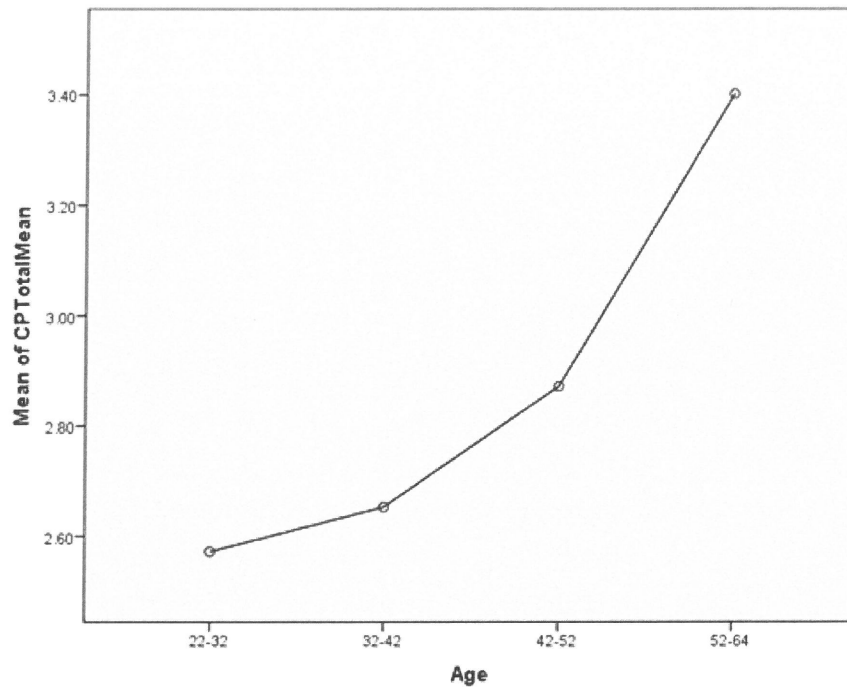
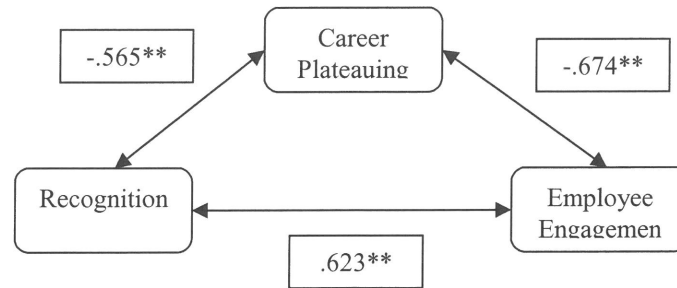


Fig. 5.2. Career plateauing and age group comparison

The correlation between various variables of the study is presented in Table 5. Significant relationships between variables of this study were observed. Career plateauing and its sub-dimensions content plateauing and structure plateauing are highly correlated ($r = .861$ and $.915$ respectively, $p < 0.01$). Employee engagement and its sub dimensions vigor, dedication and absorption are highly correlated ($r = .89$, $.901$ and $.865$ respectively, $p < 0.01$). Recognition and its sub dimensions individual recognition, achievement recognition, work performance and measure dedication are highly correlated ($r = .886$, $.928$, $.946$ and $.936$ respectively, $p < 0.01$).

The three main variables included in the study: Career plateauing, employee engagement and recognition have significant negative relationship ($r = -.674$ and $-.565$ respectively, $p < 0.01$). A significant correlation exist between employee engagement and recognition ($r = .623$, $p < 0.01$).



** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Fig. 5.3. Correlation between CR,EE and RE

With regard to career plateauing, significant negative relationships were found with vigor, dedication and absorption ($r = -.597, -.67$ and $-.512$ respectively, $p < 0.01$). A similar pattern of significant negative relationship between career plateauing with individual recognition, achievement recognition, work performance and measure dedication ($r = -.49, -.554, -.475$ and $.57$ respectively, $p < 0.01$).

A. Hypothesis testing

H1a: A negative relationship between career plateauing and vigor.

Spearman's correlation was used to test this hypothesis, and the result provided support to the negative relationship between career plateauing and vigor (Table 5).

H1b: A negative relationship between career plateauing and dedication.

Hypothesis 1b was found to be supported with correlations.

H1c: A negative relationship between career plateauing and absorption.

Results support the negative relationship between career plateauing and absorption.

H2a: Individual recognition affects positively career plateaued employees.

The results support hypothesis 2a.

H2b: Work recognition affects positively career plateaued employees.

Hypothesis 2b that predicted a positive relation between work recognition and career plateaued employees was supported (Table 5).

Table 5.3. Correlations amongst study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. CPT	-	.86**	.92**	-.67**	-.59**	-.67**	-.51**	-.57**	-.49**	-.55**	-.48**	-.57**
2. CP	.86**	-	.59**	-.75**	-.57**	-.75**	-.66**	-.46**	-.43**	-.45**	-.35**	-.50**
3. SP	.92**	.59**	-	-.48**	-.47**	-.48**	-.33**	-.50**	-.44**	-.50**	-.42**	-.52**
4. ET	-.67**	-.75**	-.48**	-	.89**	.90**	.87**	.62**	.59**	.58**	.50**	.66**
5. EV	-.59**	-.57**	-.47**	.89**	-	-.72**	-.66**	.60**	.57**	.57**	.51**	.58**
6. ED	-.67**	-.76**	-.48**	.90**	-.72**	-	-.70**	.60**	.55**	.55**	.47**	.64**
7. EA	-.51**	-.66**	-.33**	.87**	-.66**	-.70**	-	.48**	.46**	.44**	.38**	.53**
8. RT	-.57**	-.46**	-.50**	.62**	-.60**	-.59**	-.48**	-	.89**	.93**	.95**	.94**
9. IR	-.49**	-.43**	-.44**	-.59**	-.57**	-.55**	-.46**	.89**	-	.79**	.74**	.82**
10. WP	-.55**	-.45**	-.50**	-.58**	-.57**	-.55**	-.44**	.93**	.79**	-	.89**	.87**
11. AR	-.48**	-.35**	-.42**	-.50**	-.51**	-.47**	-.38**	.95**	.74**	.89**	-	.84**
12. MD	-.57**	-.50**	-.52**	-.66**	-.58**	-.64**	-.53**	.94**	.82**	.87**	.84**	-

Note. CPT = Career Plateauing Total; CP = Content Plateauing; SP = Structural plateauing; ET = Engagement Total; EV = Engagement vigor; ED = Engagement Dedication; EA = Engagement Absorption; RT = recognition Total; IR = Individual Recognition; WP = Work performance; AR = Achievement Recognition; MD = Measure Dedication.

** $p < .01$. N = 103

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of career plateauing on employee engagement within Holcim and the role of recognition that could affect this relation. The interest in studying the career plateauing phenomena is that the turnover rate within Holcim reaches zero, leading to a potential plateau phenomena across its employees. This low turnover rate is due to the fact of continuous commitment of employees towards the company, due to the very competitive benefit that Holcim offers. So even if the employee feels plateaued reaching a disengagement level, he tends to stay with the company due to the long list of benefits. Holcim offers its personnel a first class full medical coverage with immediate reimbursement of medication and doctors' fees, in additions to the partial pay of schools and university up to three children, furthermore in some positions company cars and phone are offered.

So having disengaged personal with main interest in the benefits provided, could put at the risk the organization. Since it is clear that the lack of employee engagement could lower the productivity, decrease innovation, reduce the quality of service and increase absenteeism, leading to lower performance and limitation of innovation and future development of the organization (Little & Little, 2006).

It is to be noted that our results showed a difference between the two group of respondent Holcim and non-Holcim. Both groups are aligned in terms of career plateauing, but we notice a discrepancy on engagement and recognition interpretation. This could be due to the effect of generational difference between the two groups, since

Holcim respondents are generally older and have been in the same company longer whereas the non-Holcim respondents were younger and might want more change and variety and expect faster progress in their careers. It could as well be related to several other factors such as company culture, the type of industry that is very rigid or even the size of the operation where people are not enough in contact with their supervisors. This could explain the difference in responses but would not affect the interpretation and the recommendations related to the results.

Therefore, the survey results will help uncover valuable and practical results to better understand engagement and plateauing phenomena. First our study highlights the positive correlation between career plateauing and its sub dimensions content plateauing and structural plateauing, as it was predicted by Milliman (as cited in Lentz, 2004). The same was confirmed for employee engagement and its sub dimensions vigor, dedication and absorption as defined by Utrecht work engagement scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Moreover, recognition and its four sub dimensions individual recognition, work performance, dedication and absorption were highly correlated and this confirms the literature of Cannon, 2015.

Results showed as well an interesting aspect of career plateauing. Career plateauing phenomena tend to increase whenever employee spends more years in the same position. This shows that when an employee has learned all the aspect of his job along the years and remains in the same position, he tends to feel plateaued since he is no longer evolving or adding new tasks to his job thus less satisfied and less motivated. This result is in accordance with the definition of Bardwick (1986) and Diffy (2000) of content plateauing. Another aspect noticed as well is the growth of career plateauing with age. The elder the employee gets, the more he tends to feel the effects of career

plateauing. This can be caused by a lack in the number of opportunities that seniors gets in the organization, since in theory they might have already moved gradually to higher positions in their past and now they are at a point of structural plateauing where no more openings are available in the company. On the other hand, it could be that at higher age the person, they are neither interested nor enthusiastic about future move that requires additional skills and learnings, and they are already in a state preparing for their retirement (Corner, 2014).

The results of this study confirm previous theoretical results regarding the relationship between career plateauing and employee engagement as described by Lapalme, Tremblay & Simard, 2009. The negative correlation between these two variables is highly confirmed in the results of the survey; the more an employee feels plateaued the less he is engaged in his work or towards his organization. Analyzing as well the results related to recognition, it shows that it affects positively employee engagement and it has a direct effect on the relation between career plateauing and employee engagement, which confirms the previous literature of Lentz & Allen, 2009. Thus, the more an employee receives recognition through coaching, feedback or by making him feel valuable for the organization, the more he feels satisfied and engaged in his job. Thus, recognition can be a factor in reducing the feeling of career plateau of workers.

While the above discussion highlights the relationship between various variables, a more specific look into the relation between careers plateauing and vigor, a sub dimension of engagement, confirms that plateauing affects negatively vigor. Which means that an employee tend to find less meaning in his work the more he is plateaued. Similar prediction, were made between plateauing and engagement absorption and the

result of the study were supportive. In other words, a plateaued individual tend to spend less time focusing and concentrating on his work, since he feels that there is no additional value for him or his future out of the additional effort he will put into the organization. Finally, the highest correlation was found with strong evidence that plateau phenomena reduce the employee dedication to his work. Thus, individual cannot find any meaning to his work and has no feeling of enthusiasm towards his current or future job, which are behaviors that described a plateaued employee.

As expected, a negative correlation between recognition and career plateauing was confirmed. Hypothesis H2a was supported by the result of the study, Individual recognition affects positively the career plateaued employee. The correlation between the two variables is negative, meaning that the more a manager provides individual recognition to his team or direct report the less they tend to feel plateaued. Results were supportive as well of hypothesis H2b, it was confirmed that the more recognition of efforts put into a work by an employee, the less he feels plateaued. The above results confirmed our prediction of the role that recognition plays, on the relation between engagement and career plateauing.

The confirmation of both hypothesis of the study, clarifies that career plateauing could be a serious phenomenon that affects the engagement of the employees on several dimensions and levels, and would probably disturb the outcome of work within the organization. In addition, as by our predictions, one of the possible means that could counter the disengagement created by the plateau is the individual recognition and work recognition provided continuously by the direct managers. Based on the exposed results, it is noted that many HR tools have to be in place to reduce the plateau phenomena,

increase engagement and foster recognition culture. Therefore, a global review of the HR strategy and its application in the current context would be of great importance.

Further to discussing our results, it is worth mentioning that the three measures: engagement, plateauing and recognition used in the survey are based on previous research and surveys developed in the West. The use of western measures in our eastern context could affect the people's understanding of certain concepts. This is not due to different languages but more by the culture and practices in each part of the world. For instance, the recognition concept could have a different understanding in the Arab world compared to the European world, due to the type of relations developed between the manager and his employee in our country. This relation could be very informal and personal but this is considered as a normal practice in our country and not as an additional value or even individual recognition to the employee. Whereas in other countries the employee would see the same type of relation as recognition. This shows that the interpretation of messages or questions could be different from once culture to the other.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A potential limitation to this studies, is the number of individual surveyed (N= 103) which plays a major role in the quality of the results. To be able to extend the results of this study as a general trend along all organizations in Lebanon, it would have been better to collect a much bigger sample that will be more representative. And since the survey was extended to reach people out of Holcim Lebanon, due to low rate of response, it would have been better to add another dimension to the survey related to the type of industry in which the respondent are, since it could have been an interesting dimension to be measured in comparison of career plateauing. In addition the high negative correlation between career plateauing and employee engagement, although in accordance with the literature, could be a sign that the employees taking the survey could have answered in the same way the question related to the two variables, due to similarity of text and questions. This has to be considered for any future research, since limitation noted in this study, is the results that displayed a high correlation between the main three variables: employee engagement, career plateauing and recognition. This could be related to method bias, that is caused by the use of three predefined survey each related to one of the variables (CP, EE and R) altogether in one survey. The bias could have been created by the confusion of the responded to the various questions each related to different concepts. This source of error is due to the fact that for example the engagement phenomena by definition is not clear enough as a sole concept by itself, but it is related and has crossover along other concepts as well.

Future research could perhaps concentrate more on other moderating factor that affect the relation between career plateauing and employee engagement. Such factors could be co-workers support and its consequence on the two variable relations. It would be of interest as well, to look into a moderating variable that could affect the relation between the three variables CP, EE and R. In addition, potential research could look into the age as continuous variable, to study the plateauing phenomena in relation to generational differences. Moreover, studying other tools that can be used by companies to face the plateauing phenomena is considered with additional value. Furthermore, additional research related to the prediction of career plateauing in organization, would lead to the development of improved structure and hierarchy of a company.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of this project is to provide Holcim Lebanon with potential recommendations on how to reduce the effect of career plateauing present in the organization. In order to do so, it is important to understand the future business strategy of Holcim Lebanon that will affect directly its HR strategy. In the coming years Holcim will maintain the same workforce with no potential expansion in the country, since the local market is served by three main cement suppliers that cover all the local need. In addition, looking regionally the most interesting market would be Syria. However, since Holcim group already have an existing plant in Syria, so no future growth is foreseen for the Lebanese plant.

Based on this future vision the main recommendation would be to develop an appropriate HR strategy that is able to tackle many areas in the organization that needs improvement mainly people's engagement and age repartition in order to secure sustainable growth to Holcim and provide better service to its clients. As a start and since the company has an aging population where most of the employees would be retiring in 10 years, the priority would be to tackle the workforce planning for the near future. Along with this process, a complete revisit of job description and redesign of the most critical position would be crucial before the start of a selection and recruitment process. Due to the actual plateau conditions in the organization, it is recommended to have mobility as an essential criterion in selection for future employees. Since this would be helpful for the rotation of employee internally or even mobility with the

Holcim group. This would allow the company to be less rigid as it is today. Then it is important that performance appraisal process to be applied fairly, where the good performers are rewarded and the non-performer be penalized. This would be a great recognition, will provide a sense of purpose for the active employees, and would be a tool to push the non-engaged to potentially get on board.

Moreover, since in the results of the study it was confirmed that career plateauing affects negatively the engagement of employees, it would be of great benefit to Holcim to be provided with these additional specific recommendations. As shown by the study recognition plays a major role in helping positively in the plateau phenomena. Holcim should encourage and support its leaders and managers by enhancing their coaching skills and pushing them to provide constructive feedback to employees whether related to work or individual performance. Since appreciation is a fundamental need for employees, recognition should be imbedded as a practice for Holcim Managers. An effort or positive result should be recognized by the management, so the person feels more and more valued. Furthermore, job enrichment is also a tool to help facing plateau phenomena through adding additional meaningful tasks to the employee's job, while supporting with the appropriate training to do so. In addition, Holcim should work on motivating their own employees through the implementation of clear career planning to replace succession planning. Since succession planning is only a proposal that might be not realized since the organization is very lean and the new opening can only happen if an employee retires or leave the company, which do not happen often. Therefore, career planning could be successful through improving the job conditions or content and by working on the personal development of a person, even if the development is not directly related to the job itself. It could help the person being

satisfied at the personal level and potentially open to new challenges. Therefore, the employee would have a better visibility of his future progress in the organization or any of its affiliates abroad by promoting mobility. This will support addressing structure plateauing that is existing due to the very lean organization of Holcim in Lebanon. Finally, a potential recommendation could be early retirement plans for senior people. Seniors who feel completely plateaued, are there waiting for the remaining time to pass so they reach their retirement. So proposing to them an early retirement plan that liberate them from their existing job and would be potentially interesting for them financially. This will be an opportunity to have opening within the company and would allow vertical or horizontal mobility for other employees to reduce their plateauing situation and gain back their full engagement and motivation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SURVEYS

Engagement and Career Plateauing Survey

Purpose of survey: Thank you for taking the time to fill this survey. The survey will take 10-15 minutes of your time. The aim of this survey is to serve an academic research and thesis on career plateauing effect on engagement, and the impact of recognition on career plateaued employee.

Disclaimer: All information collected through this survey will be strictly confidential.

Instruction: Please fill below survey as by below scale

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

1. Sex

Male

Female

2. Age range

22-32

32-42

42-52

52-64

3. A) Employee Level

Junior

Mid-career

Senior

B) Number of years spent in the same position:

1-3 years

3-5 years

5-10years

10+ years

4. At my work, I feel bursting with energy

1 2 3 4 5

5. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous

1 2 3 4 5

6. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work

1 2 3 4 5

7. I can continue working for very long periods at a time

1 2 3 4 5

8. At my job, I am very resilient, mentally

1 2 3 4 5

9. At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well

1 2 3 4 5

10. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose

1 2 3 4 5

11. I am enthusiastic about my job

1 2 3 4 5

12. My job inspires me

1 2 3 4 5

13. I am proud on the work that I do

1 2 3 4 5

14. To me, my job is challenging

1 2 3 4 5

15. Time flies when I'm working

1 2 3 4 5

16. When I am working, I forget everything else around me

1 2 3 4 5

17. I feel happy when I am working intensely

1 2 3 4 5

18. I am immersed in my work

1 2 3 4 5

19. I get carried away when I'm working

1 2 3 4 5

20. It is difficult to detach myself from my job

1 2 3 4 5

21. I expect to be constantly challenged in my job

1 2 3 4 5

22. I have an opportunity to learn and grow a lot in my current job

1 2 3 4 5

23. My job tasks and activities have become routine for me

1 2 3 4 5

24. My job responsibilities have increased significantly

1 2 3 4 5

25. My job requires me to continually extent my abilities and knowledge

1 2 3 4 5

26. I am challenged by my job

1 2 3 4 5

27. I am not likely to obtain a much higher job title in my organization

1 2 3 4 5

28. I expect to advance to a higher level in my company in the near future

1 2 3 4 5

29. My opportunities for upward movement are limited in my present organization

1 2 3 4 5

30. I expect to be promoted frequently in my company in the future

1 2 3 4 5

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

1 2 3 4 5

32. The likelihood that I will get ahead in my organization is limited.

1 2 3 4 5

33. My personal well-being is important to my supervisor.

1 2 3 4 5

34. My supervisor makes me feel that I matter.

1 2 3 4 5

35. My supervisor is sensitive to my needs.

1 2 3 4 5

36. I receive congratulations from my supervisor when I reach specific goals.

1 2 3 4 5

37. My supervisor thanks me when I successfully reach performance goals or other targets.

1 2 3 4 5

38. My supervisor recognize(s) the quality of the work that I do.

1 2 3 4 5

39. My supervisor comments on the level of professionalism I exhibit through my work.

1 2 3 4 5

40. My hard-work and dedication are noticed by my supervisor.

1 2 3 4 5

41. My supervisor takes the time to thank me for the amount of effort I put into my work.

1 2 3 4 5

42. I feel my supervisor appreciates how devoted I am to my job.

1 2 3 4 5

43. My supervisor acknowledges my loyalty to our team / department

1 2 3 4 5

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