

Entrepreneurial Success, Knowledge Workers Plateauing and Turnover: The Impact of Relatedness

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Abstract- Knowledge workers retention is increasingly being recognized as a source of entrepreneurial success. Thus, we argue that the sustainability of such knowledge-based success depends on the effective and efficient management of knowledge workers plateauing and turnover. This study therefore sought to examine why knowledge workers experience career plateauing and show intention to quit, and the relationship between entrepreneurial success and the type of plateauing/turnover. The data generated were analysed using Z-score and regression analysis. It was found that reduced organizational hierarchies, reduced promotion opportunities, and fewer competitive positions are the factors that influence plateauing, while entrepreneurial success has a negative relationship with the significant types of plateauing. Also, lack of recognition/competitive reward system, inadequate training/development opportunities, and managerial/leadership style are the factors that influence turnover, while a negative relationship was found to exist between entrepreneurial success and the significant types of turnover. It is therefore pertinent for managers to assess and understand the factors influencing plateauing and turnover, and the types of plateauing and turnover that are prevalent in their enterprises. This knowledge will certainly help to minimize the effects of the factors and types of plateauing/turnover on entrepreneurial success.

Index Terms- Entrepreneurial success, knowledge workers plateauing, knowledge workers turnover, business enterprises.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's contemporary business world, business enterprises are under great pressure of highly competitive and global markets (Duygulu and Ozeren, 2009). This condition is constantly impinging on the capability of business enterprises to retain employees whose knowledge has high competitive value and by extension enhances the success of their enterprises (Jamrog, 2004; Ready and Conger, 2008; Somaya and Williamson, 2008). Knowledge workers retention has become the major differentiating competitive factor for most enterprises (Samuel and Chipunza, 2009). However, recent studies have shown that retention of knowledge workers is a difficult task for entrepreneurs as this category of employees are being attracted by more than one enterprise/entrepreneur at a time with various kinds of incentives (Samuel and Chipunza, 2009; Chiboiwa et al., 2010).

Thus, the new world of entrepreneurship development has placed the development of entrepreneurs and/or knowledge workers at the centre of entrepreneurial success. One of the most

important drivers of productivity and sustainable growth of business enterprises and national economies according to Chiboiwa et al. (2010) is the quality and stability of the knowledge workers. However, prevailing evidence from business enterprises in Nigeria suggests a high rate of knowledge workers plateauing and turnover which has negatively affected the growth and stability of the enterprises.

Additionally, when knowledge workers move, they migrate to competing business enterprises with the knowledge and trade secrets acquired from their former enterprises/entrepreneurs thereby creating a more critical situation for the latter (Abassi and Hollman, 2000). This situation therefore demands that entrepreneurs should identify the reason(s) for this frequent change of employment by workers so as to enable them device strategies for keeping essential knowledge workers for a rather longer tenure. Thus, this study seeks to identify why workers experience career plateauing and intention to quit, and the types of plateauing/turnover that have significant effect on entrepreneurial success.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge and Knowledge Workers

Knowledge is a comprehensive concept with profound meanings (Nonaka, 1994). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, cited in Rollinson, 2008) identified two types of knowledge, tacit and explicit. Tacit knowledge is part of a person's experience, know-how, intuition and insight even when not explicitly specified. Furthermore, explicit knowledge is in the form of rules, guidelines and principles that are easily communicated, codified and expressed, and are available to anyone within a particular context. According to Sanchez et al. (1996) both tacit and explicit knowledge are needed for a business enterprise to succeed. However, combining tacit and explicit knowledge could be a complex task and in some circumstances may not be possible. In other words, reconciling what is in employees' mind with what is stored in data bases requires extensive research and needs a high level knowledge-based technology (Soliman and Spooner, 2000). This near impossibility in combining tacit and explicit knowledge and the dynamic nature of the environment has further necessitated the categorization of knowledge as general-purpose and firm-specific (Spender, 1996; Dyer and Singh, 1998; Becker, 1992, cited in Andreu et al., 2008). General-purpose knowledge is useful not only inside a particular firm but also externally in the environment. Its market value is approximately equal to its value within a firm.

Conversely, firm-specific knowledge: (1) plays the role of a skeleton where new knowledge pieces are attached so as to make

global sense to the firm tradition, culture and the way to understand things (Splender, 1996); and (ii) defines the way in which new knowledge will be actually put to work, hence giving it the “idiosyncratic firm’s touch” that will differentiate its utilization from that of other firms. Firm-specific knowledge thus plays a fundamental role in the creation and deployment of a new knowledge and is, therefore, a source of dynamic capabilities (Helfat et al., 2007). Knowledge is always embodied in a person; carried by a person; created, augmented or improved by a person; applied by a person; taught and passed on by a person; used or misused by a person. The shift to the knowledge society therefore puts the person in the centre (Drucker, 2001). This person is a knowledge worker. Knowledge workers are: those employees who develop the new knowledge that gives a business enterprise a competitive advantage; the major competitive resources of their enterprise; those who own the means of production and who carry the enterprise’s knowledge, information and know-how in their heads (Lagacee, 2007); the workers who capture and apply tacit knowledge (Lubit, 2001; Nissen, 2005) and the workers who create and/or maintain the technical core of the business enterprise.

Knowledge Workers Plateauing and Turnover

Since market demand can certainly drive knowledge worker discontentment and movement, entrepreneurs are feeling an urgent need to preserve as much tacit knowledge as possible from the workers (Cappell, 2000; Droege and Hoobler, 2003), while investment in the workplace is important, spending on such technologies alone has not ultimately helped. Hence, these workers are still being plateaued and are quitting their employment. In addition, the entrepreneurs are experiencing dwindling entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurial success implies positively affecting the lives of others and making a living through a well managed innovative product and/or service (Agbim and Oriarewo, 2012). Also, entrepreneurial success has also been viewed as starting and achieving some benefits from a business; adding value to employees, customers and the larger community; doing something you love; finding meaning and purpose in work; and helping others (Maxwell, 2003; Kauanui et al., 2009, as cited in Agbim et al., 2013).

Employee plateau is defined as the point where employees likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion is very low (Lee, 2003; Tremblay and Roger, 2004; Yamamoto, 2006). The main causes of employee plateau in organizations are; re-engineering, downsizing and spin-off-activities which makes further advancement within organization become more unlikely (Andreas and Reidi, 2000; Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006). Employee plateau is also caused by: inappropriate abilities and skills, low need for career mobility and slow company growth (Appelbaum and Finestone, 1994); lack of job stability, reduced organizational hierarchies and reduction of promotion opportunities (Choy and Savery, 1998); and mergers and takeovers that results to layoffs and fewer competitive positions (Appelbaum and Santiago, 1997; Yamaoto, 2006). Employee plateau is also caused by competition, age and organizational needs. Competition in the sense that for a given position, the individuals may be seen as less qualified than other candidates, including some presently, outside the organization. Age, management may see older employees as undesirable in their

organizational needs, an employee may be seen as valuable in a particular position so much so that he will not be moved to a higher position (Tremblay and Roger, 2004).

The different types of employee plateau or plateauing experienced by knowledge workers in organizations include: (i) organizational plateauing– arises where there is ability to perform well in higher level jobs but unable to do so owing to lack of job openings and/or management belief that knowledge workers do not desire higher level jobs; (ii) professional plateauing– results when knowledge workers find their jobs unchallenging because the jobs provide few opportunities for professional development and future employability (Lee, 2003); (iii) structural plateauing– results from the end of promotions due to the pyramidal structure of organizations; (iv) content plateauing– occurs when the knowledge workers know their jobs too well and become bored; (v) life plateauing– results when committed knowledge workers begin to feel unsuccessful in their work. This spreads feeling of being plateaued and trapped in life (Burke and Mikkelsen, 2006); (vi) contribution plateauing– results when knowledge workers are not learning or developing competencies and when their ability to add value is limited (Patternson et al., 1987). Employee plateauing whether its organizational, professional, structural, content, life or contribution still affect knowledge workers performance because chances of upward movement are limited or doomed. These in the long-run would affect the organization in terms of high rate of labour turnover because the employees may feel that their career advancement in the organization is at stake (Ongori and Angolla, 2009).

Employee turnover is a much studied phenomenon. According to Price (1977) the term “turnover” is the ratio of the number of organizational members who have left during the period being considered divided by the average number of people in that organization during the period. Abassi et al. (2000) stated that employee turnover is the rotation of workers around the labour market; between firms, jobs and occupations; and between the states of employment and unemployment. However, to date, Kaliath and Beck (2001) asserted that there has been little consistency in findings on why employees quit their jobs. This is partly because of the diversity of employees included in such studies.

Existing literature highlight reasons for employee turnover in the organizations; job stress (Firth et al., 2004); insufficient information on how to perform the job (Tor et al., 1997); in capcipation, death, the need to provide care for children and aged relatives (Booth and Hamer, 2007); organizational inefficiency and instability (Zuber, 2001); managerial/leadership style (Magner et al., 1996; Labor, 1997); hiring practices, lack of recognition and competitive compensation system (Griffeth et al., 2000; Abassi and Hollman, 2000); toxic work environment, lack of interesting work, lack of job security, inadequate training and development opportunities (Sherman et al., 2006).

Employee turnover has been classified as; (1) voluntary (that is, beyond the control of management), (2) involuntary (that is, within the control of management) (Booth et al., 2007), (3) functional (that is, bad performers leave, good performers stay), and (4) dysfunctional (that is, good performers leave, bad performers stay) (Abassi and Hollman, 2000; Stovel and Bontis, 2002). Employee turnover occurs when employees leave their

jobs and must be replaced. Replacing existing employees is costly to organizations and destructive to service delivery. It is therefore imperative for entrepreneurs to reduce, to the minimum, the frequency at which employees; particularly knowledge workers quit the organization.

Effects of Knowledge Workers Plateauing/Turnover on Business Enterprises

In the short run, knowledge workers plateauing help the affected workers to master work skills and gather psychic energy in preparation for a transition period (Rita and Lawson, 1998). Lee (2003) further noted that a plateaued worker could still have high satisfaction as the situation helps him to concentrate on developing new skills with which to seek other career opportunities elsewhere. This will consequently affect the performance of the enterprise and engender high degree of labour turnover.

Turnover is not only destructive to the business enterprise, it is also costly. These costs include; costs associated with replacement (Philips, 1990; John, 2000) and costs such as lost productivity, lost sales and management time (Wasmuth and Davis, 1993; Catherine, 2002). Also, business enterprises suffer customer defection when a knowledge worker quits. The knowledge, skills and contacts that a departing employee takes out of the business enterprise constitutes a huge loss. The attributes are, in most cases, lost to a competitor business enterprise that may use this to gain competitive advantage (Stovel and Bontis, 2002; Sutherland, 2004; Bliss, 2007).

Stovel and Bontis (2002) asserts that functional turnover help to reduce suboptimal organizational performance. However, high turnover can result in the loss of business patronage and relationship, and can even jeopardize the realization of organizational goals. Similarly, Abassi and Hollman (2000) argued that dysfunctional turnover damages the organization through decreased innovation, delayed services, improper implementation of new programmes and reduced productivity. Such activities according to Stovel and Bontis can radically affect the ability of organizations to prosper in today’s competitive economy, leaving even the most ambitious entrepreneur unable to attain entrepreneurial success due to their inability to retain their knowledge workers.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample size for the study is made up of 1,640 respondents. Systematic sampling technique was employed to select the respondents from the membership list of different associations of entrepreneurs within Makurdi town. These associations include sachet water, fashion designers, upholstery, restaurants, hotels, printers and publishers, supermarkets, beauty saloons, welders, automobile mechanics, electronic mechanics, bakeries and confectionaries, and schools.

Data for the study was collected using questionnaire. The questionnaire is made up of four sections – the demographics of the respondents, the factors influencing knowledge workers plateauing/turnover, types of plateauing/turnover and entrepreneurial success. The first section sought to elicit responses on gender, age and duration of service. The second section identified ten factors each that influence knowledge workers plateauing/turnover. The respondents were requested to score (1-4) the factors influencing career plateauing and intention to quit the job. In the third section, the respondents were requested to identify why they are plateaued and why they would want to quit their job from the list that described 6 and 4 types of plateauing and turnover respectively. The fourth section requested respondents to rate the entrepreneurial success of the business enterprise from a list of non-financial items. In both sections three and four, the respondents were requested to rate each type on a 5-point Likert scale. The degree of agreement varied from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) and accordingly in between. The respondents for the study are made up of production/technical workers, managers, marketers, chefs, fashion designers and beauticians/hair stylists.

The questionnaire was validated by researchers in entrepreneurship development and human resource management, while the reliability test yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.788. Fifty one out of the 1,640 questionnaire that were sent out were discarded on account of missing data, leaving 1,589 useable questionnaire for a response rate of 97%. Z-score test at 0.05 level of significance was used to rate factors that influence knowledge workers plateauing/turnover, while multiple regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between entrepreneurial success and knowledge workers plateauing on one hand, and between entrepreneurial success and knowledge workers turnover on the other hand.

IV. RESULTS

Among the respondents, 79.8% and 20.2% are males and females respectively, while majority (66.3%) of them have ages ranging from 20-40 years. Concerning educational qualification, 8.7% of the respondents have FSLC, 34.4% have O/L, 34.1% have NCE/OND, 17.7% have HND/B.Sc., and 5.1% have PG degrees. Majority (77.4%) of the respondents have been in their present employment for a period between 1-9 years.

Table 1 depicts that reduced organizational hierarchies (17.96), reduced promotion opportunities (14.39) and fewer competitive positions (9.76) are the significance factors that influence knowledge workers plateauing. Furthermore, table 2 reveals that the three most significant factors that influence knowledge workers turnover are; lack of recognition and competitive reward system (15.38), inadequate training and development opportunities (13.75), and managerial/leadership style (3.83).

TABLE 1: Z-Score Rating of Factors Influencing Knowledge Workers Plateauing

S/No.	Factors	Educational Level					Total
		FSLC	O/L	NCE/OND	HND/B.Sc.	PG	
1.	Inappropriate abilities/skills	-0.08	-0.72	-0.91	-0.33	-0.21	-2.25
2.	Reduced promotion opportunities	3.11	2.45	2.64	3.38	2.81	14.39*

3.	Lack of job stability	0.24	0.12	0.18	0.69	0.04	1.27
4.	Slow company growth	-1.63	-1.48	-1.74	-2.01	-2.31	-9.17
5.	Reduced organizational hierarchies	4.84	3.88	2.85	2.91	3.48	17.96*
6.	Fewer competitive positions	0.86	2.09	2.47	1.8	2.46	9.76*
7.	Competition	-1.42	-0.47	-0.82	-1.24	-1.11	-5.06
8.	Age	-1.06	-1.24	-2.40	-2.12	-0.89	-7.71
9.	Organizational needs	-1.46	-1.28	-2.04	-0.48	-0.81	-6.07
10.	Low need for career mobility	0.11	0.21	0.18	0.73	0.44	1.67

Level of significance >1.96 at 0.05

* Significant factors

TABLE 2: Z-Score Rating of Factors Influencing Knowledge Workers Turnover

S/No.	Factors	Educational Level					Total
		FSLC	O/L	NCE/OND	HND/B.Sc.	PG	
1.	Lack of interesting job/job stress	-0.02	-0.28	-0.71	-0.39	-0.24	-1.64
2.	Lack of job security	-0.04	-1.27	-1.09	-0.98	-1.08	-5.46
3.	Incapacitation	-0.42	-0.12	-0.22	-0.31	-0.14	-1.21
4.	Need to care for children/aged relatives	-0.29	-1.43	-1.66	-0.32	-0.73	-4.93
5.	Organizational inefficiency	-2.40	-1.91	-1.65	-1.26	-1.34	-8.56
6.	Managerial/leadership style	0.81	0.23	0.94	0.76	1.09	3.83*
7.	Hiring practices	0.15	0.16	0.47	0.48	0.04	1.30
8.	Lack of recognition/competitive reward system	2.86	2.93	3.42	3.36	2.81	15.38*
9.	Toxic work environment	-3.20	-3.66	-3.31	-3.66	-3.41	-17.24
10.	Inadequate training/development opportunities	1.45	2.17	3.49	3.72	2.92	13.75*

Level of significance >1.96 at 0.05

* Significant factors

The six types of knowledge workers plateauing or predictor variables (organizational, professional, structural, content, life and contribution) shown in table 3 explained 60.4% of the variation in entrepreneurial success of business enterprises. The values of the significant predictors indicate that as organizational plateauing increases by one unit entrepreneurial success decreases by 0.875, as professional plateauing increases by one unit entrepreneurial success decreases by 0.730, as life plateauing increases by one unit entrepreneurial success decreases by 0.776, as contribution plateauing increases by one unit entrepreneurial success decreases by 0.608. Thus, there is a negative relationship between entrepreneurial success and the significant types of plateauing.

It can also be deduced from table 4 that the four types of knowledge workers turnover or predictor variables (voluntary, involuntary, functional and dysfunctional) explained 45.8% of the variation in entrepreneurial success of business enterprises. The values of the significant predictor variables (involuntary and dysfunctional plateauing) indicate that as involuntary turnover increases by one unit entrepreneurial success decreases by 0.157, and as dysfunctional turnover increases by one unit entrepreneurial success decreases by 0.185. This implies that there is a negative relationship between entrepreneurial success and the significant types of turnover.

TABLE 3: Coefficients in the Regression Analysis of the types of Knowledge Workers Plateauing and Entrepreneurial Success

Predictor variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.157	0.875		12.262	0.000
Organizational plateauing	3.942	0.532	-0.875	-13.857	0.000
Professional plateauing	2.218	0.457	-0.730	-8.195	0.000
Structural plateauing	2.645	0.346	0.696	7.440	0.726
Content plateauing	2.915	0.595	0.588	5.580	0.441
Life plateauing	5.431	0.608	-0.776	-9.443	0.000
Contribution plateauing	0.344	0.875	-0.608	-5.877	0.000

Dependent variable: Entrepreneurial success

TABLE 4: Coefficients in the Regression Analysis of the types of Knowledge Workers Turnover and Entrepreneurial Success

Predictor variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.354	0.216		1.634	0.000
Voluntary turnover	0.433	0.251	0.038	1.726	0.087

Involuntary turnover	0.858	0.198	-0.157	-4.334	0.000
Functional turnover	0.340	0.306	0.145	1.110	0.269
Dysfunctional turnover	0.518	0.219	-0.185	-2.366	0.000

Dependent variable: Entrepreneurial success

V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Knowledge workers retention is a crucial challenge for today's business enterprises as they face increasing competition with the demands for even more of such workers. Fundamentally, the worrying situation is the rate at which it is becoming increasingly widespread in various business enterprises (Lee, 2003; Yamamoto, 2006). The study found that knowledge workers were plateaued by factors such as reduced organizational hierarchies, reduced promotion opportunities and fewer competitive positions. Owing to the fact that strategies to minimize the effects of these factors were not put in place, these factors gave rise to different types of knowledge workers plateauing. The identified types of knowledge worker plateauing that negatively affects entrepreneurial success of the entrepreneurs/employers are lack of job openings (organizational plateauing), unchallenging jobs occasioned by few opportunities for professional development that enhances future employability (professional plateauing), a feeling of being unsuccessful on the job (life plateauing) and limited opportunities to develop competencies and to add value (contribution plateauing).

Ineffectiveness and inefficiency in the management of knowledge workers plateauing according to Ongori and Angolla (2009) has contributed to knowledge workers turnover in business enterprises. More so, as noted by Chiboiwa et al. (2010), a number of factors have been attributed to the increase in the level of knowledge workers turnover worldwide. The present study found that the knowledge workers are about to quit their present employment because of lack of recognition and competitive reward system, inadequate training and development opportunities, and managerial/leadership style. To this end, William and Werther (1996, cited in Chiboiwa et al., 2010) posits that knowledge workers turnover is accelerated when knowledge workers are dissatisfied with the reward system in an enterprise. This result is similar to that of Chiboiwa et al. (2010) who found that turnover is largely attributed to poor reward system. The present study further reveals that the employers of the respondents are not paying attention to the factors that influence knowledge workers turnover. This consequently gave rise to turnover; which is the manifestation of intention to leave. The types of turnover that are prevalent in the enterprises and which has negatively affected entrepreneurial success in the enterprises are involuntary and dysfunctional turnover. Turnover according to Samuel and Chipunza (2009) is not only destructive but costly to business enterprises. This in the view of Abassi and Hollman (2000) is because most often when knowledge workers move, they migrate to competing business enterprises with the knowledge and trade secrets acquired from their employers thereby creating an even more critical situation for the latter. This situation therefore demands that entrepreneurs/employers of knowledge workers must device strategies that will help in keeping these workers for a longer time.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed based on the results of the study.

1. Given that there is increase in direct and indirect costs of knowledge workers plateauing/turnover, entrepreneurs/managers should assess and understand knowledge workers critically at each stage of their career so as to identify the factors influencing plateauing and the type of plateauing they are experiencing. The outcome of such assessment will help the managers to develop strategies to minimize the effects of the factors and the type of plateauing.

2. Managers should use the flat rather than the tall structure system so as to make lower cadre workers to take more responsibilities thereby reducing the degree of plateauing and turnover. Also, job rotation should be employed as a strategy for broadening workers skills and by extension reducing boredom.

3. Business enterprises should adopt a management/leadership style that creates a more cordial relationship between managers and other workers. This relationship should also create an environment that allows workers to acquire training and develop competencies that will position them for opportunities elsewhere if chances of upward movement are limited in their present business enterprise.

4. According to table 3, the significant predictor variables, namely, organizational, professional, life and contribution plateauing have negative effect on entrepreneurial success. Managers must make conscious effort to reduce the prevalence of these types of knowledge workers plateauing so as to increase their entrepreneurial success. Also, table 4 shows that involuntary and dysfunctional turnover have significant negative effect on entrepreneurial success. This suggests that to increase entrepreneurial success, the business enterprises should device strategies that can reduce these types of turnover.

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