

## FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER ADVANCEMENT

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**Career advancement prospects rank high in the order of importance to every enthusiastic person when they enter a profession. This is so because the new entrant may be looking for upward mobility in his/her chosen profession or career. Opportunities for career advancement must be sought for and be known, or explained to, such new staff. To some personnel, the future prospects available for job mobility must be seriously examined at the beginning. Career advancement is affected by the following factors: Job performance; Contextual performance; Gender; Characteristics of human capital; Mentors, networking and commitment to development; Commitment to career development and career orientations; Satisfaction with the psychological contract; Selection criteria and methods; Organizational technology; Human resource planning; Organizational restructuring. Career plateau which involves employees stagnating temporarily or permanently in their careers is a serious career management problem that many employees are facing. This not only affects individual employees in terms of reduced morale, but organizations as well due to decline in productivity. Does the severity of this problem depend on gender or age of the employees? Future researchers can consider establishing if there is a relationship between biographical variables and severity of career plateau problem.**

**Key words:** Career, Career advancement, Career mobility

### INTRODUCTION

Callanan and Greenhaus (1999) noted that a career is normally defined as a pattern of work experiences spanning the course of a person's life and is usually perceived in terms of a series of stages reflecting the "passage" from one life phase to another. As Hall (1996) notes, a career is a series of upward movements with increasing income, power, status and security, but it has become a relic of the past. As a result, new types of career contracts have emerged, such as

career resilience (Waterman, Waterman and Collard., 1994), the boundary less career (Kotter, 1995; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), the post-corporate career (Peiper and Baruch, 1997) and the protean career (Hall and Moss, 1998). These new perspectives on career issues are interrelated. They all seek to bridge the gap between traditional career concepts, which emphasize stability, hierarchy and clearly defined job positions for career progression, and contemporary

concepts, which emphasize the continuous adaptation of the organization and careers to a competitive environment.

A career can be seen as having two components: an employee's objective participation in work and his or her subjective commitment (Pulkkinen, Ohranen and Tolvanen, 1999). Career advancement is a key goal for many employees and is a contributory factor that helps enhance the level of satisfaction with one's subjective work life. Conversely, lack of promotion can have various negative effects on both employees and the organization; for example, work satisfaction or organizational commitment will decrease if the promotion

path is blocked (Leung, 2004). However, moving towards the top is usually very difficult within the corporate hierarchy because promotion itself is ambiguous and subjective in nature. In particular, trends in the changing workplace have created new employment practices that have implications for career advancement. Company restructuring, early retirement, buyouts and the growing use of short-term contracts have led employees to fear that career opportunities will no longer be available (Leung and Chang, 2002).

Career advancement prospects rank high in the order of importance to every enthusiastic person when they enter a profession. This is so because the new entrant may be looking for upward mobility in his/her chosen profession or career. Opportunities for career advancement must be sought for and be known, or explained to, such new staff.

To some personnel, the future prospects available for job mobility must be seriously examined at the beginning.

Edem (1999) posits that career development means the knowledge and understanding of choices and decisions made at the employee's entry into a profession. Career information is significant and contributes to the understanding of individual differences among employees, their motivations and the influence of numerous variables on job satisfaction and productivity. Furthermore, career information enhances career advancement prospects in that it furnishes human resources personnel with knowledge about employee's skills, aptitudes and abilities, which are essential components of job selection and training decisions. Edem (1999) further argues that career advancement prospects, if made known to new employees, assist them in meeting their developmental needs and aspirations, as well as realizing their optimal potential. The literature on personnel psychology and management science indicates that lack of career advancement prospects is frequently indicated as a strong reason for some personnel to dislike their job. Furthermore, it has been stressed that if career advancements are mentioned and the criteria stressed to newly employed staff, this could act as a major contributor to job satisfaction. In some developed countries such as the UK and the USA, college and university graduates are quickly exposed to the promotional opportunities available in some careers. Consequently, many young bright and ambitious graduates select their jobs largely because they think that they will

have a good opportunity for career advancement.

Drucker (1991: pp 236) noted that “happy workers are efficient and productive workers”. One can then assume that if employees are happy and satisfied with issues involving their career advancement prospects, they will become productive in terms of discharging their duties. Studies have been carried out on the career advancement prospects of workers especially in developed countries, but few have been conducted in Africa, and Kenya in particular.

Career advancement can be taken to mean one or more of the following: an increase in the scope or level of responsibility, greater authority, a raise in salary and/or an increase in benefits, and a move to a higher level within a hierarchical structure (Whitely, Dougherty, and Dreher, 1991). There are many factors that may facilitate or impede one’s career prospects, which can be broadly divided into two main groups: situational attributes and personal attributes (Tharenou, Latimer and Conroy, 1994). Situational attributes refer to organizational and job features. Career advancement is influenced by the type of job, the importance of the job to the organization and the amount of power attached to the job (Melamed, 1995). Further, personal attributes (e.g. education, ability and work experience) refer to job-relevant human capital, which fosters the pace and thoroughness of job-related knowledge and enhances innovation and the quality of priority setting when dealing with novel situations.

Leung (2004) contends that various rationales have been put forward to explain differences in career advancement. One set of explanations focuses on human-capital attributes such as education, seniority, training and work experience. For example, educational attainment is a key determinant of access to high-paying and high-status jobs. Human-capital explanations suggest that differences in career advancement can be remedied by enlarging individuals’ developmental opportunities. In fact, much research has shown that developmental experiences in employees’ earlier career lives are vital contributors to their subsequent success as employees are provided with an environment in which they can learn by doing (Nabi, 2000; Van Velsor et al., 1998). Assignments contribute to skills and knowledge enhancement, including international responsibilities, negotiation roles, managing multiple functions and key business units (Ohlott, 1998). Such job experiences not only lead individuals to be more dynamic and adaptive, but also develop their capacity and confidence to deal with more senior responsibilities (Northcraft, Griffith and Shalley, 1992). The means for obtaining a better job within organizations are limited. Scarcity of positions at higher levels and resources for development generate keen competition among members of an organization (Leung, 2004). Callanan and Greenhaus (1999) defined organizational career advancement as an objective assessment of an employee's career movement, either via hierarchical advancement or horizontal mobility. They further argued that an employee is

considered to have a consistent and fair opportunity either to move higher in the organizational hierarchy or to move to other functional areas within the firm to gain broad-based experience for developmental purposes).

Career mobility is defined as “the movement employees experience among organizational roles” (Vardi, 1980: pp 347). This movement is comprised of several dimensions such as amount, rate, direction, and initiator of mobility (Vardi, 1980), as well as change in monetary rewards (Judge and Bretz, 1994). The amount of organizational career mobility refers to the overall number of inter-job mobility cases. The direction of organizational career mobility refers to both the horizontal and vertical patterns. Horizontal mobility is defined as job changes that occur at any given level and that do not require considerable change in organizational or occupational responsibilities, while vertical mobility refers to those movements up the managerial or occupational ladder (job changes) that are accompanied by considerable changes in the individual's organizational or occupational responsibilities (Vardi, 1980).

Lazear (1999) noted that career advancement implies a dynamic process. Perception of career success is determined by not only the absolute level of current career attainments, but also the scale and pace of recent career advancements. Career success is constantly evaluated based on recent events of upward mobility, turnover propensity also evolves over time. A significant salary increase indicates the

recognition of an employee's job performance; similarly, an employee's status advancement based on promotion implies his/her supervisor's favorable selection. A large salary increment and a timely promotion also signal that an employee may be better suited to the current organization with organization-specific skills and training than to other employers. In contrast, slow upward mobility, such as a small salary increase or a halt in promotion, suggests that an employee may have reached the peak of career development. Such a gloomy picture can drive an employee to pursue more favorable external job alternatives. Stagnant career advancement may also present a negative shock and precipitate an individual's withdrawal decision.

Stagnant career advancement in salary and status often has strong negative implications in the organizational context. On many occasions, career success is not self-referent according to individual inspiration, but defined by comparison with one's peers or colleagues (Heslin, 2005). Given a shared perception of the career timetable among employees within an organization (Lawrence, 1990), lagging behind the expected timetable in career advancement may trigger an employee's feeling of “relative deprivation” (Crosby, 1984). Moreover, in the eyes of an employee, career advancement below expectations can discredit organizational justice (Greenberg, 1990). This likely exacerbates an employee's dissatisfaction with his/her supervisor, which exerts a strong influence on withdrawal cognition (Aquino, Griffeth and Allen, 1997).

## **FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER ADVANCEMENT**

Based on review of empirical studies and theoretical literature, career advancement is affected by the following factors: Job performance; contextual performance; gender; characteristics of human capital; mentors, networking and commitment to development; commitment to career development and career orientations; satisfaction with the psychological contract; selection criteria and methods; organizational technology; human resource planning; organizational restructuring.

### **Job performance**

Organizations approach promotion decisions as a mechanism to grant positive feedback and remuneration for high job performance. Promotion is a key driver for employees to achieve better performance (Campion, Cheraskin and Stevens, 1994). To a large extent, the work outcomes of an employee determine her/his promotion path within the organization. Human resource management policies often emphasize attainments in organizations.

For employees who have already accumulated some experience within their organization, it is less difficult to identify the signals according to which an organization may make a promotion decision. One of the key signals is how well an employee has been performing her/his job. Performance rating plays a major role in the promotion decision process (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1993). Evidence shows that employees, who are appreciated for their achievements at work, enjoy relatively

high organizational career advancement. Schaubroeck and Lam (2002) found a moderate correlation between job performance and promotion decision in two different countries: Hong Kong ( $r=0.48$ ) and the USA ( $r=0.44$ ). Igbaria and Baroudi (1995) found that information system employees who received higher performance ratings have better chances for advancement within their organization.

Job performance should indeed be a basis for promotion decisions, because this form of reward reinforces good performance, where the employee is motivated to maintain the good performance or even improve. This also sends a message to the non-performers, who clearly see the link between performance and promotion, hence this serves as a wake-up call for them. However, Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1993) have not taken note of the bias and errors that are associated with performance appraisal exercise. There can be a high degree of subjectivity if promotion decisions are based on job performance due to the subjective nature of performance appraisal. Ivancevich (2007) argues that subjective bias and favouritism are real problems that create opposition to most performance appraisal systems. Even if the system is well designed, problems can arise if the raters (usually supervisors) are not cooperative and well trained. Inadequate training of raters can lead to a series of problems in performance evaluations, which include: problems with standards of evaluation, central-tendency error, contrast effects, recency error, leniency and strictness errors, halo error and many others. Personal bias can also make the exercise erroneous. In

order for job performance to serve as a basis for promotion decisions, performance should be measured with a high degree of objectivity. The raters should be properly trained, especially on the various types of errors, the performance appraisal instruments should be properly designed and the assessment criteria should be clear among all the raters. Ivancevich (2007) further contends that, for the evaluation system to work well, the employees must understand it and feel that it is a fair way to evaluate performance. They must believe that the system is used correctly for making decisions concerning pay increases and promotions. The system should also be implemented in a way that fully informs employees about how it is going to be used. It is also important that all the factors that can interfere with an employee's performance be considered, and if possible controlled in order to ensure that some employees do not have advantage over others.

### **Contextual performance**

Despite the importance of job performance in promotion decisions, contextual performance may also play a significant role. Contextual performance is a broad term used to define discretionary activities and behaviors that go beyond the formal requirements of a job task (Motowidlo, Borman and Schmit, 1997; Motowidlo and Van Scotter, 1994). One major form of contextual performance is organizational citizenship behavior (Chen, Hui and Segó, 1998), which is defined as an informal practice or an extra-role behavior that goes beyond formal role requirements (Smith,,

Organ and Near, 1983; Organ, 1988). Organizational citizenship behavior has received considerable research attention over the past decade (see for example, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bachrach, 2000).

A study conducted by Carmeli, Shalom and Weisberg (2007) examined the relationship between two forms of organizational citizenship behavior (altruism and compliance) and career advancement. In addition, they examined the implications of working overtime for organizational career advancement. The study found that employees who were promoted in their organization exhibited low absenteeism and lateness, had a greater tendency to work overtime, and performed their jobs better than those who had not earned a promotion. This clearly signals that although managers tend to show that they rely on job performance as a key assessment tool, they also consider behaviors such as absenteeism, lateness and overtime.

Scholars have argued that organizational citizenship behavior has a role in the enhancement of organizational effectiveness (e.g. George and Bettenhausen, 1990; Karambayya, 1990; MacKenzie *et al.*, 1991, 1993; Organ, 1998; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1997; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994, 1997). This relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and organizational performance can take various forms: enhancing co-worker and managerial productivity, freeing the management from work-related problems so that it may focus on more productive tasks; directing scarce resources to purely maintenance functions,

...serving as an effective tool in coordinating activities between team members and among work groups; providing a more pleasant work environment that improves the organization's ability to attract and retain the best people; enhancing the sustainability of the organization's performance, and improving the organization's adaptability to its environment (Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1997).

Scholars such as Motowidlo *et al.* (1997) and Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994) have argued that contextual performance, which refers to discretionary activities and behaviors that go beyond the formal requirements of a job task, should guide promotion decisions. In as much as these behaviors enhance organizational effectiveness, the organization itself is a major determinant of these behaviors. The organization has to play its part by ensuring that employees are comfortable and their welfare taken care of.

The question is, if most of the employees strived to do “things that are right and proper,” would there be enough promotional opportunities for all these employees?

Since different employees would do different things that are perceived as right and proper, which behaviors would be considered, and which ones would be left out?

For contextual performance to be considered in making promotion decisions, the behaviors that are perceived as right and proper should be well documented and communicated to all employees, so as to give all employees an equal chance of promotion, as long as they exhibit the desired behaviors. There should also be

different forms of reward other than promotion because upward mobility is not possible for most employees. There are limited positions as one goes up the corporate ladder.

### **Gender stereotypes**

According to Straub (2007) women's participation in the paid workforce is one of the most significant social changes of the last century. Women have made noteworthy advances in management, which used to be a largely male preserve (Powell, 1999). Even so, women have not made inroads into the higher levels of corporate power (Davidson and Burke, 2000; McGregor, 2002; Vinnicombe, 2000). Studies in various countries such as Norway (Hoel, 2002), the USA (Catalyst, 2000, 2003, 2004), Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Burke and Mattis, 2000) and the UK (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003) monitor the presence of women in executive positions and reveal that the lack of women at the top of large companies is a global phenomenon. Surveys indicate that gender is still a common barrier to women's career advancement in many international contexts. It seems that their progression to the senior executive level is blocked by an invisible barrier – the so-called “glass ceiling” (Powell and Butterfield, 1994).

For decades, researchers have sought to understand why so few women occupy senior management positions, and why many fail to reconcile ambitious career aspirations with family. Most basically, career and family can either hinder or facilitate each other. Given that work-family research has its conceptual roots in role

conflict theory (Katz and Kahn, 1978), much of it has focused on the conflict linkage whereby participation in one role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in another (Byron, 2005; Ezzedeen and Swiercz, 2007; Dierdorff and Ellington, 2008; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Nevertheless, there is growing awareness that facilitation can coexist with conflict in work/family relationships (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Kirchmeyer, 1992).

Garavan and Coolahan (1996) observed that despite increasing participation rates in the labour force worldwide, very few women have risen to positions of leadership and authority. Martin, Harrison and Dinnitto(1983) in Garavan and Coolahan (1996) analysed the main barriers to career mobility faced by women in hierarchical bureaucratic organizations as: Societal stereotypes which see women as “properly in the home” rather than the workplace depict women as less committed than men to jobs and careers. Such claims are used as justification to deny women access to job ladders leading to the top; The tendency to locate low-skilled assembly type operations, mainly staffed by women, in periphery functions removed from the core firm, limits career opportunity for women; The educational system prepares women for female-dominated jobs usually involving short career ladders; Women lose out because of the political nature of the internal promotion system in hierarchical organizations; Primary responsibility for home and children affects the ability of women to relocate. The lack of child-care

facilities provided by work organizations is also a problem.

Kirchmeyer (2002) observed that current workforce trends indicate that organizations face at least three potential dilemmas associated with women's career aspirations. First, some young, highly educated women are opting to stay at home, primarily because they believe that they cannot have it all, and do not necessarily feel compelled to try. Second, women who do want to work, even those who manage to make it to the top, are opting into less challenging jobs with more flexibility because they are not as willing as men to put their careers ahead of personal commitments. Finally, it is difficult for women who have interrupted their careers to reenter the workforce and be seriously considered for promotion.

Litzky and Greenhaus (2007) argued that organizations have to contend with these factors if they want to be able to retain and develop women for top jobs. Although research suggests that overt workplace discrimination is less of an issue for women in their early careers than it once was, women in the establishment and advancement stages of their careers are still facing challenging social and institutional biases. A study done by Cooper and Davidson (1993) revealed that one of the serious problems women in management face is blocked promotion. For the vast majority of women who are struggling for individual recognition and achievement, the road up the executive ladder is not so easy. They face blockages at all levels as well as difficulties in the interface between their job and home. Currently, many promotional



advances in industry are based on the availability of managers to be mobile, to move from one site to another, from one area of a country to another, or from one country to another. This is a major stumbling block for any married female manager, and one that most organizations have failed to address. In addition to job transfers, managers are also expected to be available for short term assignments abroad or in other parts of the country. Once again, female managers with families are unable to offer their services and this tends to count against them in terms of their prospects for advancement.

There are also social and familial factors that make it harder for married women to put forth the kind of effort and dedication that gets individuals anointed for advancement. Despite record rates of female labor participation and progress in gender attitudes, modern Western family norms still hold women accountable for hearth and home, which makes it harder for them to advance (Beatty, 1996; Rowney and Cahoon, 1990; Tichenor, 2005). And although having children does not change their professional orientation (Korabik and Rosin, 1995), women are more likely than men to amend their careers in response to parenting (Blair-Loy, 2001; Stroh, Brett and Reilly, 1992). Consequent workforce absences and fewer years of experience undercut their advancement and earnings across occupations (Waldfogel, 1998).

Wood (2008) contends that in an attempt to account for this low representation of women in senior management, previous research has considered the possibility that

career obstacles are experienced by women throughout their management careers. Career obstacles have been considered through the various theoretical perspectives of gender differences, organisational structure or gender stereotypes. These theoretical perspectives variously considered that women were “different” and lacked the appropriate skills to fill management positions (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990), or that situational differences within organisations accounted for inequalities for women in the workplace, rather than any deficiency in the individual manager (Kanter, 1977). The gender stereotype perspective examined the assumptions that were made about female managers and the role such assumptions may play in career advancement. In essence, women were not seen as an appropriate fit in a managerial role (Heilman, 2001; Lyness and Heilman, 2006; Schein, 2001) because of a perception that females are more suited to a supportive, nurturing role such as motherhood than the decision-making role of management.

### **Characteristics of human capital**

The human capital characteristics of employees are important in explaining career advancement. Human capital theory postulates that employees who invest in education, off-the-job training, acquire planned work experience and enhance managerial competencies will have increased levels of career advancement. Although Becker (1993) considered level of education and training the most important investments in human capital, he defined human capital broadly as all factors that increase the knowledge and skills of an individual, such as type of occupation.

Moreover, in the context of new careers theory (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Hall, 1996; Sullivan, 1999), human capital should encompass factors that increase and facilitate the individual's learning other than formal education and training.

The human capital theory proposes that employees make rational choices regarding investment in their own human capital (Marimuthu, Arokiasamy and Ismail, 2009). Individuals make rational choices regarding whether or not to invest more time, effort and money in education, training and experiences. Human capital represents the investments that people make in their skills. Human capital theory suggests that investing in one's skills and education should lead to greater value in the marketplace. This is because salary and promotions are proximal indicators of how much an individual is valued within a free market economy; hence, the human capital factor is expected to be a strong predictor of career advancement (Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad and Othman, 2011).

Education is moderately associated with career advancement. Tharenou et al. (1994) and Johnsrud and Heck (1994) provide evidence of direct and indirect effects. Directly it influences advancement and indirectly it influences participation in training and development. The relationship is moderated by gender. There is some evidence that the type of qualification and the educational institution are relevant. Baum (1995) and Ruddy (1998) found little support for the proposition that completion of a Diploma or Degree enhances promotion prospects within the Irish hospitality

industry. The career patterns of managers with or without a degree were substantially similar. In contrast, Baruch and Peiperl (2000) and Baruch and Leeming (2001) report a positive relationship between education and career development. Baruch and Peiperl (2000) found that participation on an MBA programme added value to the graduate and improved the graduate's employability, career advancement and remuneration prospects.

The relationship between participation in training and development and career advancement is stronger (Tharenou and Conroy, 1994). Investment in management development has a more potent effect (Roberts and Biddle, 1994). Being prevented from participating in training and development is related to a lack of promotion. The relationship is however complicated. Over time, the unavailability of training, or the refusal by the individual to undertake training and development, can impede an employee's progress up or across job ladders. The selection for and participation in training and development activities carries powerful symbolic messages within an organization (Garavan and Coolahan, 1996). Guntz (1990) argues that an excess of training or over-specialization in one area may make it difficult for an individual to change job ladders.

Pinnington (2011) in his study on 'competence development and career advancement of lawyers' noted that theoretically, any professionals' expertise and work experience is potential human and relational capital (Hitt *et al.*, 2006) that can be appropriated for the benefit of clients,

peers and also for themselves. The lawyers' expertise and experience are part of what constitutes a professional's competence at work (Sandberg and Targama, 2007) and in so far as these capitals are appropriable resources (Kay, 1993) they may be transformed into a capability for clients, contribute to the collective knowledge and business benefit of the organisation, and advance professionals' careers (Adler *et al.*, 2008).

Indeed an employee's investment in training and education should not be in vain, that is why promotion decisions based on human capital characteristics are an excellent means of appreciating additional skills and knowledge acquired. Authors tend to put a lot of emphasis on formal education and training. In my opinion, on the job training programs are also very effective in imparting job-specific skills, as well as multiple skills. This gives an employee a chance of either moving up the corporate ladder or across other functional areas. Some on-the-job training methods such as coaching, mentoring, delegation, and special assignments can equip employees with skills that enhance employee's movement across other functional areas. Besides, gaining exposure on the operations of all functional areas in the organization gives employees better chances of occupying managerial positions, since managers are supposed to have a good understanding of all functional areas. Work experience should also not be considered in isolation, unless it corresponds with one's performance. Some employees may have worked for a very short time but may end up performing much better than those who may have worked for a couple of

years. There may be a tendency of employees who have worked for a long time feeling like "they know it all", and getting comfortable with the skills they have acquired so far. Such employees may not be keen on getting conversant with the emerging trends, rendering their wealth of experience outdated.

### **Mentors and networking**

The influence of mentors and the acquisition of social capital are significant. Mentor presence and mentor career support is positively related to managers' promotion in early career (Whitely *et al.*, 1991). Mentoring processes are more significant in the early career however there is little research highlighting their value in the later career (Raabe and Beehr, 2003; Scandura, 1992). Scandura (1998) found that some mentoring relationships could be dysfunctional from a career advancement perspective. Managers who advance are likely to have personal contacts in diverse groups within and beyond the organisation (Gould and Penley, 1984; Ruddy, 1998). Meyerson (1994) found that managers who have strong external ties had better advancement. Ruddy (1998) found that successful hotel managers were interpersonal networkers. Gender effects exist. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) found that male managers had more favourable social networks and personal contacts than females. They provided more information, support and access to jobs.

Seeking career guidance both internal and external to one's organization can provide a person with significant advantages resulting in the possibility of rapid career

advancement. According to Gould and Penley (1984), seeking career guidance is one of seven key strategies for career achievement. They found that women reported engaging in significantly more guidance seeking than did men. Mentorship and supportive work relationships also have been found to have an effect on career advancement as well as perceived career success (Kram, 1988; Turban and Dougherty, 1994).

Availability of formal or informal mentorship programs, social contact with superiors, and networking potential seem to be associated with greater career success and upward mobility. Having a mentor, for example, has been shown to be critical to women's job advancement in organizations (Burke and McKeen, 1990; Lunding, *et al.*, 1979; Roche, 1979; Stumpf and London, 1981). Although mentoring may be important to the advancement of both male and female employees, it may be even more critical for women. Morrison *et al.* (1987) found that 100 percent of the women in their study who had reached the highest levels of their occupation had mentoring support, as opposed to only 55 percent of men. Similarly, Henning and Jardim (1977) also found that every woman in their study had a mentor who contributed to their success. More recently, Burke and McKeen (1997) have cautioned that the potential benefits of mentoring might be smaller than originally thought. Nonetheless, they still note its importance for favorable work outcomes.

Networks of relationships are essential because they are social resources as well as contexts in which careers take shape

(Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad and Othman, 2011). A large body of empirical research provides evidence of the central role networks play in the career development process (Higgins and Kram, 2001; Tymon and Stumpf, 2003; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2006; Ismail and Mohd Rasdi, 2007). Networks directly shape career outcomes by regulating access to jobs, providing mentoring and sponsorship, channeling the flow of information and referrals and the sharing of information for opportunities of collaboration and resource sharing. Social networks are also settings in which processes such as socialization and identity development materialize (Barley and Tolbert, 1997).

In addition to structured mentorship relationships, other forms of social contact may also be critical to job advancement. A study of female faculty revealed that they rated fellow colleagues as the most helpful factor in their academic environment (DeNitto *et al.*, 1995). Social contact may also come in the form of company support for attending seminars, workshops, and conferences. Any opportunity to engage in work-related social contact may aid in subsequent job advancement.

There seem to be a contradiction between researchers on mentoring and gender, where some researchers such as Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) found that male managers had more favourable social networks and personal contacts than females. Other researchers contend that having a mentor has been shown to be critical to women's job advancement in organizations. This is in line with Raabe and Beehr (2003) and Scandura

(1992) who observed that mentoring processes are more significant in the early career however, there is little research highlighting their value in the later career.

Internal social networks may have a greater impact on career advancement than the external networks. This is because internal mentors seem to understand the organization better and can therefore offer guidance and support that reflects the situation in the current organization. The kind of skills that employers value vary from organization to organization, thus internal mentors may be well versed with the skills that are most valued by the protégé's organization.

### **Commitment to career development and career orientations**

Career commitment and commitment to development are relevant individual-level variables. Jones and Whitmore (1995) found that career commitment predicted advancement to division-level management. Howard and Bray (1990) and Ruddy (1998) found support for the proposition that commitment to career predicts advancement. A related career concept is the career orientation of the employees. Schein (1996) postulated that employees who possess career anchors that match their occupational role are more likely to experience progression. Whitely et al. (1991) found that the career orientation will be manifest in attitudes to short and medium-term career prospects. It appears that managerial and interpersonal orientations are more predictive of advancement (Sharf, 2002).

The commitment of the employee to development is related to the level of career

advancement (Noe and Steffy, 1987; Facticeau et al., 1995). Specific elements of commitment to development include continually taking courses to improve skills, availing of organisational training opportunities, moving jobs to gain knowledge and skill, utilising a mentor and emulating a role model (Noe, 1996; Mathieu et al., 1992). Several studies highlight a positive relationship between commitment to development, task performance, and advancement (Chew et al., 2002; Quinones, 1995). Noe (1996) highlights the importance of career development strategies. He postulated that the use of a career strategy by managers is likely to encourage developmental behaviour.

Schein argues that employees who possess career anchors that match their occupational role are more likely to experience progression. This contradicts the career anchor on technical competence, because he argues that those employees who are motivated by technical competence can forego promotion since they are more focused on building technical skills and becoming specialists in their respective fields. As employees pursue their careers, they are driven by various motives. Those that are motivated by managerial competence will work towards developing skills that will give them an edge as they strive towards moving up the corporate ladder.

### **Satisfaction with the psychological contract**

The psychological contract is considered a relevant variable in explaining career advancement (Turnley and Feldman, 1999;

Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; Rousseau, 1996). There is limited empirical investigation concerning the influence of the psychological contract on career advancement. Sullivan (1999) provides a strong argument that the content of the psychological contract is important in explaining attitudes and commitment to career management. There is however, no universal agreement amongst researchers on how the psychological contract should be measured. Some commentators (Rousseau, 1996; Schalk and Freese, 1993) contend that it can be measured by focusing on the employee's perceptions of both the obligations of the employee to the organisation and the employer to employees. Blumenfeld et al. (1987) studied the expectations of potential hospitality managers and found that work and advancement opportunities were key elements of their psychological contract. In the career context, both Kram (1996) and Allred et al. (1996) highlight a number of elements that characterise the modern psychological contract from the employee's perspective. Kram (1996) argues for a relational approach to careers. This consists of managers proactively diagnosing career issues and engaging in coaching activities in collaborative learning environments. Allred et al. (1996) focused on the increased emphasis on self-managed careers, ownership of career development, continuous learning and change.

Anakwe et al. (2000) found that manager's expectations concerning development, career management, self-knowledge and utilization of skills are associated with personal learning, goal setting, the selection

of career strategies and career decision making.

### **Selection criteria and methods**

An employee's mobility within an organization may be restricted if there is a mismatch between the abilities and attributes of the individual and the requirements of the job. Over-reliance on typically unreliable selection devices like interviews and some personality tests can facilitate this mismatch (Garavan and Coolahan, 1996). Arnold *et al.* (1995) point out that the high expectation of advancement of new recruits can lead to disillusionment, loss of motivation and intention to leave the organization. He advocates realistic job previews to overcome this problem.

Selection criteria and methods if properly used can eliminate mismatch between ones abilities and attributes, and the requirements of the job. Garavan and Coolahan (1996) argue that interviews and some personality tests are unreliable selection devices. If interviews are well implemented, they can yield tremendous results. Questions that will elicit all the required information from the candidate need to be well thought-out and structured, and the interviewers need to be competent and experienced in conducting interviews. If this is put in place, then interviews can be a reliable selection device.

Mismatch between individual abilities and attributes and those required by the job could be as a result of other factors, and not necessarily the selection methods. The authors did not discuss other factors that can promote this mismatch. Armstrong (2010) pointed out some factors that affect the

recruitment efforts of an organization, such as nepotism, where managers bring in friends and relatives who may not be suitable; political interference, where politicians and other prominent government officials may push the organizational management into absorbing people who are unqualified, among others.

### **Organizational technology**

The type of organizational technology and the technological environment can significantly influence an individual's career opportunities. Fast-moving high-technology organizations may have no option but to "buy in" expertise. Such industries are typified by short career ladders with limited opportunity for hierarchical advancement. Kanter (1984) found that high-technology companies provided "dual ladders"; technical employees advanced along a track supposedly in parallel with a managerial track.

Another problem is the obsolescence of technical professions. Employees who have failed to make it into general management may become surplus to requirement in the event of technological change. Guntz (1990) makes the point that the lateral moves are possible when the technology is simple but difficult when the technology is complex. In this case vertical moves predominate.

Obsolescence of technical professions should not be a hindrance to career advancement. Fast moving high technology organizations should provide a continuous learning environment for its employees, so that they can continually refresh their skills in order to embrace technology as it unfolds.

In this case the only expertise the firm may bring in is for training its employees on the new technology. This does not limit the opportunity for hierarchical advancement. As a matter of fact, employees in high technology firms will be keen on self-improvement, where they initiate their own learning and implement personal development plans. This supplemented with formal training programs organized by the firm, would equip them with skills to embrace new technology.

### **Human resource planning**

Garavan and Coolahan (1996) observe that inaccurate human resource forecasting can result in overstaffing. In this situation the normal pyramid restrictions on upward mobility are exacerbated. External business conditions resulting in slow organizational growth can limit the number of opportunities for increased responsibilities, and mobility prospects for staff are further limited if the organization has to downsize in order to survive. Opportunities for career advancement are also directly related to and reflect a firm's size and organization's life cycle position, i.e. growth, maintenance, decline and turnaround.

Like Garavan and Coolahan (1996) have argued, one of the measures an organization can take in order to survive when faced with adverse business conditions is downsizing. However, it should be noted that downsizing is the only action that can be taken to curb the problem. Other measures of dealing with surplus can also be considered eg restricted hiring, reducing working hours (especially for part time workers) and early retirement.

Even when organizations downsize, there are still career advancement prospects for the remaining employees through lateral moves. Employees who survive downsizing end up performing tasks that used to be performed by those that have left the organization. This may call for cross-functional movement, which indeed is career advancement, since employees acquire broader experience for developmental purposes.

### **Organizational restructuring**

Walston and Chou (2011) in their study on 'CEO perceptions of organizational consensus and its impact on hospital restructuring outcomes' observed that pressures continue unabated for health care organizations to improve quality, lower costs, and meet the increasing needs of patients. In particular, increased competition, technological advances, and resource scarcity have caused hospitals to seek internal efficiencies by exploiting firm resources and capabilities, while concurrently learning and acquiring new competencies (Arndt and Bigelow, 1995; Smith and Toft, 2005). Many hospitals have undergone restructuring to meet these demands and gain competitive advantage. Restructuring has involved changes such as product differentiation and cost reductions via the incorporation of new structures, technologies, and relationships (Dalton, 1996; Walston *et al.*, 2004). These change efforts have led organizations to learn new skills, routines, and processes, but at the same time maintain concurrent reliability.

Recent trends, such as restructuring or rationalization of companies, have

constrained job mobility and career opportunities. The decentralization of production, and the migration of work towards periphery firms where inferior labour markets exist, have segmented the labour forces. This segmentation has precipitated a situation where "worker mobility between tiers is increasingly constrained by a widening skill gap and geographic separation" (Garavan and Coolahan, 1996: pp 30-40). Cassell (1990) comments that the outcome of this type of restructuring and the breaking up of organizational job ladders will be fewer jobs at the higher end of the ladder and a decline in opportunities for future generations of workers.

Li and Yeo (2011) observed that traditional career development discussions are much more linear and hierarchy-based as compared to contemporary career development models. In traditional career systems, employees compete for limited promotional opportunities and expect to climb the corporate ladder. Organizations set up career systems that reward employees' loyalty and longevity. Accordingly, it creates a stable environment but might result in redundancies and stall the career paths of high potential employees. In contrast, the contemporary career development models suggest that the organization's role in people's career has become less relevant if not totally obsolete as a result of changes in the society and organizational restructuring (Leana, 2002). Careers have become much more transitional, flexible, multi-directional, and dynamic (Baruch, 2004).



The concept of boundary less career, protean career, and post-corporate career came about as a result of more turbulent and less predictable business environments. A stable career with one organization could possibly be shattered by the infiltration of organizational downsizing and restructuring (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994). This situation changes the career expectations of both the individual and organization subsequently resulting in a new kind of psychological contract (Rousseau, 1996). From an organizational perspective, in this increasingly competitive environment, it is important to attract and retain only employees with the necessary skills who will help to secure the competitiveness of the organization (Barnett and Bradley, 2007). From an individual perspective, with the realization that no single organization can offer a reliable source of career advancement, many choose to manage their own careers (Arthur *et al.*, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

A review of empirical studies on the factors that affect career advancement have revealed the following factors: job performance; contextual performance; human capital characteristics; mentors, networking and commitment to development; commitment to career, development and career orientations; satisfaction with the psychological contract; selection criteria and methods; organizational technology; poor human resource planning; and organizational restructuring. Of all the factors, job performance, gender and human capital characteristics seem to have a significant

impact on career advancement. Organizations have roles to play in assisting employees to reflect on their existing expertise, assess current work practices, and develop and pursue strategies for competency development and career advancement.

.Mentoring should be capitalized on as one of the strategies in advancing the career of employees. Organizations should try more innovative mentoring strategies such as e-mentoring or virtual mentoring (Simmonds and Zammit Lupi, 2010) to complement the traditional face-to-face meetings of a mentor and the protégé in line with the sophistication in communication technologies. These types of mentoring technique allow for more freedom in terms of content and mobility because they facilitate the mentoring process by going beyond physical constraints.

Organizations should strengthen their policies in collaborative works with other organizations not only locally but also internationally. Such networks can be started individually but to flourish further and to make networking between employees at the international level sustainable, organizational support in terms of financial resources is needed. Organizational support in the forms of flexibility in work, transparent promotional structure, career planning and rewards would go a long way in helping employees advance in their careers.

With the large number of women entering management, it is prudent for organizations to develop corporate human resource

policies that will minimize the current stresses and strains, which are particularly being experienced by working women with families.

The significant advancements including increased education, empowerment of women in social and economic activities have aided women in coping with their new roles as working women. However, they need support on several fronts. Success today requires companies to best utilize the talent available to them. To do this, barriers to upward mobility for women have to be removed. Organizations can best utilize the talent available to them by removing barriers to the recruitment of and upward mobility for women. They need to introduce policies that guarantee to help women to advance their careers by evaluating and promoting women based on their own merits and performance rather than stereotypical views bound by culture and traditions. This involves concerted efforts to support women managers through developing their careers and retaining them and assisting them in their career advancement through the implementation of training programs that may help alter the attitudes towards women in management. Other ways in which organizations can help provide career opportunities for women is through career planning and counseling, providing senior management sponsorship, helping male managers to come to terms with women managers, and creation of informal support networks for all women.

A lot of research has been done on women and career advancement. Most of this research focuses on women as a minority

group not excelling like their male counterparts in career advancement.. Now that the main barriers for women's career advancement are stereotypes and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities, do other minority groups face the same problems in career advancement? Future researchers should try to establish the challenges that other minority groups such as the physically challenged face in career advancement. Career plateau which involves employees stagnating temporarily or permanently in their careers is a serious career management problem that many employees are facing. This not only affects individual employees in terms of reduced morale, but organizations as well due to decline in productivity. Does the severity of this problem depend on gender or age of the employees? Future researchers can consider establishing if there is a relationship between biographical variables and severity of career plateau problem.

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