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Career plateauing in older managers:
A systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

Economic changes have resulted in a new contextual spectrum for career development with relatively secure, hierarchical, organizational structures at one end and flatter, de-layered, insecure environments at the other. This narrative review explores the literature relating to the psychological determinants of career plateauing in older managers against such a background.

The body of literature informing this issue was analysed using the systematic review method. This is designed to produce a transparent and replicable account of how pertinent studies are located and the basis on which they are either included or rejected through use of explicit relevance, generalisability, and quality criteria. The overall outcome is a synthesis and summary of what is known about the topic, the limitations of the review, and identification of gaps in knowledge - the latter forming recommendations for future research.

The findings of this review indicate that a range of subjective determinants may play a part in career plateauing in older managers including fairly stable attributes such as personality, and individual and social identity, and more fluid factors such as attitudes, and motivation. Motivation may be driven by one or more goals including future success, present job satisfaction or ongoing personal development.

Numerous other determinants may play a role but little evidence is available as to how the range of potential influences operates at an individual level. Further qualitative research is needed into individual older managers' experiences and how they may differ according to gender.

Keywords:

Career stages, older workers, career development, working women

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This study represents an investigation into the determinants of career plateauing in older managers (age 50 and over) and how these differ by gender. The investigation will be undertaken by means of a systematic review of the literature relating to the field.

The purpose of a systematic literature review in academic research is to access a body of relevant knowledge to which any future research will contribute. The process is based on an initial scoping study which broadly outlines the relevant bodies of literature in which the topic is situated. The subsequent review procedure involves systematically and methodically identifying and evaluating pertinent articles, papers, books and other data, extracting relevant material (through a process of applying predetermined relevance and quality criteria) and synthesising and reporting the findings to inform future research.

The systematic literature review has been developed as a means of introducing rigour, reliability and transparency to what may otherwise be a fairly subjective, erratic and impenetrable process (Tranfield et al., 2003).

1.2 Context and purpose

Today demographic, economic and social change mean UK employers face a growing and dichotomous challenge: how to manage increasing numbers of older individuals, particularly women, who want or need to work beyond what has been regarded as normal retirement age whilst simultaneously trying to prevent key older individuals from retiring early, taking with them irreplaceable skills and experience (Loretto and White, 2006; Taylor, 2002).

In order to deal with this dilemma and to prevent extended working lives from deteriorating into a potentially open-ended and financially costly problem, employers need to achieve greater clarity about the myriad individual determinants relating to either the continuation or cessation of progress in older employees' careers. As most UK research has focused on older workers in general this would be particularly valuable in relation to the careers of older managers.

Understanding the nature of career plateauing, generally defined in terms of *lack of career progress* involves first addressing what "career progress" means. The literature fails to provide a clear and consistent definition although Baruch and Rosenstein's (1992) notion of "career" as "*a process of development of the employee along a path of experience and jobs in one or more organizations*" (Baruch and Rosenstein, 1992, p.477) highlights the notion of forward movement and mobility in itself. In the absence of a better explanation we use this as a reference point on which to base this study.

Similarly, studies to date have failed to indicate whether career progression is the result of *doing certain things* and a career plateau the result of *a failure to do those things* or whether the two states represent a culmination of different, and differently configured components (Chao, 1990).

Much of the difficulty in defining career progression results from changes in career structures caused by the massive economic changes in the 1980s and early 1990s that saw organizational down-sizing, de-layering and often, the mass redundancy of layers of managerial staff (Allen et al., 1999; Sullivan, 1999). This led to a breakdown in the notion of traditional, hierarchical, employer-controlled careers where "career progression" represented upward linear advancement, resulting in a situation in which most individuals are now following career paths that are non-linear, less predictable and inadequately explained by current models of career development (Sullivan et al., 1998).

Although the initial career framework of many older employees may have been traditional, the majority in recent years will have had to adapt to the changes that have occurred around them. Many may have survived redundancy, redeployment, or

massive restructuring, whilst seeing colleagues and fellow cohort members forced towards rapid exit. In such a context, career plateauing; “*a situation where upward career progression ceases and vertical and horizontal movement also becomes limited*” (FERENCE, 1977, p.602) is increasing both in frequency and duration as managers’ careers peak earlier, employees retire later and flatter organizational structures offer fewer opportunities for advancement (Ettington, 1997).

This study aims to achieve a greater understanding of the objectively and subjectively different outcomes that represent “plateauing” in older managers’ careers, and the adequacy of existing theory for accounting for its occurrence. Overall, the intention is to gain insight into which variables contribute towards plateauing in older managers, how they differ by gender, and why some older managers become plateaued while others continue to progress.

Improved clarity concerning these issues would be helpful for both employers and employees themselves in terms of maintaining older individuals’ commitment, focus, and human capital value over the remainder of their working lives.

1.3 Document structure

This section provides a brief outline of subsequent chapters:

Chapter 2: the scoping study which informs the later systematic review.

Chapter 3: the methodological approach to data identification, extraction and evaluation.

Chapter 4: the descriptive findings, outlining the results of the application of the processes outlined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5: a synthesis of the conceptual findings resulting from the data extraction and analysis.

Chapter 6: a discussion of the findings of the literature review

Chapter 7: the limitations and learning points of the review, plus indications for future research.

2 Scoping study: positioning the review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the literature situated at the intersection of three bodies of knowledge relevant to the determinants of career plateauing in older UK managers.

Recently, factors such as economic and social pressure, technology, globalization, and resource limitations have fundamentally affected the nature of “careers” from both the individual and employer perspective. There is now a tendency for employers to promote managers more quickly in order to retain talent, resulting in them peaking earlier, while flatter organizational structures offer fewer vertical promotional opportunities (Sullivan et al., 1998; Sterns and Miklos, 1995).

As a result objective career progression ceases earlier and career plateauing is now significantly increasing both in frequency and duration (Ettington, 1997). A study by Allen in 1999 suggested that in the US in the 1990s between a third to a half of managers could be classified as plateaued. Apart from a probable overall reduction in managerial proportions due to downsizing there is little to suggest that this situation is fundamentally different in the UK today.

These changes have led to the emergence of new models of career development such as *boundaryless* (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) and *protean* careers (Hall, 1976). In essence these embody the notion of *self-managed* rather than *employer-managed* careers and *horizontal* rather than *vertical* movement - often across a wide number of employers. Allegiance is to oneself rather than an employing body.

At the same time as economic and social forces have been changing organizational structures, age in the workplace has emerged as a contentious and significant topic. Technology and the decline of manufacturing mean most roles are now not affected by any decline in employees’ physical strength, while improvements in medical

science mean that later working lives for the majority can continue for many years longer than in previous generations (Taylor and Walker, 1997).

In the past career plateauing in older employees was considered almost a natural process (FERENCE, 1977; VEIGA, 1981) generally representing a few short years before retirement in a situation where retirement ages were becoming ever earlier. Now, in the UK and many other Western economies, the contextual workplace trends outlined above are being compounded by demographic, social and economic changes leading to many older employees either having to, or wanting to, work longer (McNair et al., 2004; Loretto et al., 2005). Pressure on employers is also magnified by government commitment to EU targets to increase the number of individuals over 50 in work.

2.2 Mapping the field

Figure 1 below illustrates the fields of literature that will be reviewed in examining the topic: career development theory, HR management theory, and individual attributes such as work motivation and identity as they relate to managers aged 50 and over.

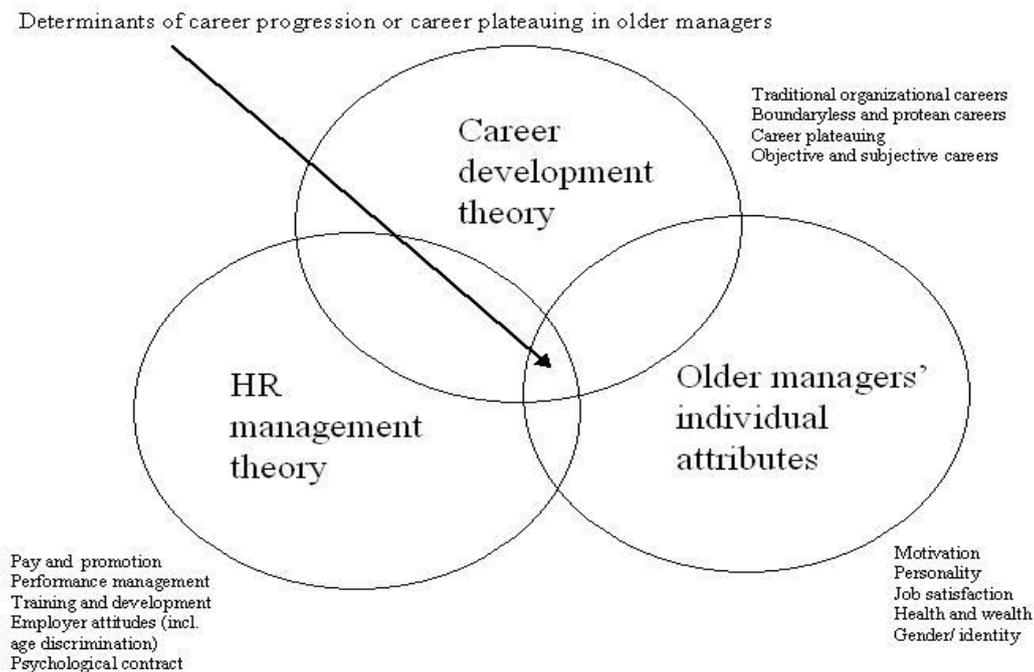


Figure 1 Map of the field of relevant bodies of literature

Each of the circles in the diagram represents a vast and wide-ranging body of literature. This scoping study will focus only on their point of intersection, specifically, literature that *informs our knowledge of factors contributing to career plateauing in older managers*.

2.2.1. Definitions

The key definitions from the literature around which this study is developed are outlined below.

Older Manager: ‘*Manager*’ represents a typology of different positions but is generally perceived as a formal position of responsibility that includes subordinates (Chambers, 1992). It can encompass positions from fairly junior, generalist supervisor/managers, to highly specialised professionals, academics and CEOs. ‘Older managers’ rather than ‘older workers’ has been chosen here as the unit of analysis as managers have the ability to both shape policy and to be shaped by it and can represent both high value and high cost.

Older: in management and careers literature is generally taken to represent both chronological age and number of years in work, with the term often being used to classify individuals who are in the mid- to later-stages of their career. Although in some studies this may refer to individuals from about age 35 onwards, a more conventional definition refers to those aged 50 and over (Greller and Simpson, 1999).

Career: “*the sequence of employment related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person*” (Arnold, 1997, p.16). This definition not only highlights the essentially sequential nature of a career but also includes an individual’s *experiences*, which may be assumed to be subjective as well as objective in nature.

Career plateauing: “*a situation where upward career progression ceases and vertical and horizontal movement also becomes limited*” (Ference, 1977, p.477). Feldman

and Weitz (1988) extend this definition to cover the situation where no further *increases in responsibility* occur, recognising that this may reflect upward progress in the absence of formal promotion.

As mentioned in the Introduction, it is not clear whether career plateauing is simply the obverse of career progression or whether they are two different concepts. As our interest is in career plateauing, we will consider career progression only in as much as it provides an overall context, or it may be inferred that absence of activities or variables that contribute to progression may lead to plateauing.

2.3 Career theories

Over the past fifty years a number of models have been developed to attempt to explain the nature of careers. Although economic developments impacting on career structure and security mean that much has changed in terms of career contexts, the workplace has not been totally transformed. As Baruch (2006, p.125) concludes: *“while much has shifted from the traditional and conventional mode, many organizations still perform within a relatively stable environment and apply well established strategies, keeping a significant share of the traditional system intact”*.

This being the case, traditional and new theories both still have a role; we examine them in greater detail below in order to understand their significance in terms of individual career plateauing.

2.3.1 Traditional career theories

“Traditional” organizational theories see the career as essentially controlled by the employer and are based on the idea of linear progression over the years through a number of specific career or life stages. Two of the most significant theories are those of Super (1957) and Levinson (1978) which we consider below.

Super's *Career Stage* theory (1957) proposed that as people progress through their careers they experience four different psychological stages: *exploration*, *establishment*, *maintenance*, and *disengagement*, representing different levels of interest, satisfaction, motivation and commitment. Career stage was determined by a person's perceptions and circumstances in relation to their career with age as a secondary and, some maintain, an unintended determinant (London and Greller, 1991).

The model also included the concept of *recycling* i.e. going back to an earlier stage as a result of a job change, although the theory failed to account for the fact that older individuals' ability to keep 'recycling' their careers can be restricted (Sullivan, 1999). It is also criticized for lack of relevance to female careers (Arnold, 1997; Ornstein et al., 1989).

Later, Levinson et al's *Life Span* model (1978), based on interviews with 40 men created four sequential age-related life stages: *childhood*, and *early*, *middle* and *late adulthood*. These vary in nature between stable and transitional states and involve different key activities and psychological adjustments.

The model is founded on the notion of a stable, consensual structure of lockstep progression. As such it has been criticized for its rigidity, lack of flexibility in relation to age, and, significantly, the extent to which it too fails to reflect the reality of women's working lives (Arnold, 1997; Powell and Mainiero, 1992). Also, although Levinson later proposed additional stages for those over 50, these were only ever sketchily described (Arnold, 1997).

A fundamental difference between these two theories is that Super's model is more concerned with individuals' *job attitudes* whereas Levinson's relates more to *career decisions* (Ornstein et al., 1989). However both are founded in a work environment in which an individual is employed in one line of work for one employer with no significant conflicts with family or other roles, i.e. they represent white, US, middle class, male career experiences of the time (Isaksson et al., 2006).

2.3.2 Boundaryless and protean career models

In an attempt to account for the nature of careers in today's delayed, downsized, insecure working environments new theories of *Boundaryless* (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) and *Protean* careers (Hall, 1976) emerged. *Boundaryless careers* are those that transcend the boundaries of a single employer, reflecting the progress of those who may change employers many times in a series of lateral, zigzag or even downward career moves (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

The protean career is a process which the person, not the organization is managing. It consists of all the person's varied experiences in education, training, working in several organizations, changes in occupational field. [It] is not what happens to the person in any one organization" (Hall, 1976, p.201).

Boundaryless careers may be perceived objectively by others or subjectively by the individual concerned, as may protean careers, although the test of these is most likely to be the perception of the individual involved (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). Both shift the responsibility for career development from the *employer* to the *individual* who creates and develops their own career identity by moving between employers, maintaining allegiance to themselves rather than a single employing body. The main features of the two career types as outlined by Sullivan (1999) are shown in Table 1 below:

	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Boundaryless</i>
Employment relationship:	Job security for loyalty	Employability for performance and flexibility
Boundaries:	One or two firms	Multiple firms
Skills:	Firm specific	Transferable
Success measured by:	Pay, promotion, status	Psychologically meaningful work
Responsibility for career management:	Organization	Individual
Training:	Formal programmes	On-the-job
Milestones:	Age-related	Learning related

Table 1 A comparison of traditional and boundaryless careers (Sullivan 1999)

Inkson (2006) regards protean and boundaryless careers as involving *action* rather than *structure*, concluding that “*boundaries are crossed because people have the will and the personal resources (the protean orientation of adaptability) to cross them*”. If this is the case, it begs the question of the extent to which self-directed movement across boundaries, driven and measured by subjective variables, has always been a model for some older managers due to the nature of their work or industry, economic or social factors, or individual personality or motivation.

This view is supported by Sterns (1995) who maintains that regardless of external context there have always been differences between those who stay and those who change jobs illustrating his point with the typology of *homesteaders*, *transformers*, and *explorers* identified by Bronte (1993, cited Sterns, 1995). This being so, it is possible that contemporary career contexts might be generating an increased prevalence of an existing phenomenon which until now has only represented the careers of a minority, rather than creating radically new models.

2.4 Career plateauing

2.4.1 Traditional explanations

To date, career theories have tended to characterise career plateauing in terms of “physical” symbols such as promotion and pay increases (Ettington, 1998). Physical plateauing is considered to be created by factors largely external to the employee including the availability of job opportunities, the individual’s value within their current role, and competition for promotion. The latter is exemplified by Rosenbaum’s (1979) Tournament model which likens career progression to a tournament where competitors who are “knocked out” of earlier rounds are precluded from competing later, thereby plateauing them within that organizational setting.

In situations where this operates (often in larger, quite structured organizations) many employees can be plateaued well before they reach their full potential and older

employees may be knocked out or disqualified because they are unable to compete on the same terms as younger adversaries (Rosenbaum, 1979).

Traditionally, career plateauing has been viewed as a negative phenomenon with plateaued individuals being seen as lacking in value compared to those who continue to progress (Near, 1984). In an attempt to identify those who retain value for the employing organization regardless of their rate of progress Ference (1977) suggested four states of managerial careers: *learners*, *stars*, *solid citizens* and *dead wood*. The last two stages referred to those who are plateaued, with solid citizens being seen as effective, while deadwood individuals are obsolete.

This model helps account for the basic divide between those managers who represent the reality of the greatest number of plateaued individuals, continuing to perform well, adding value and exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviours despite lack of advancement (solid citizens) and those who become stagnant (dead wood). The latter group may be bored, disengaged, and frustrated even though these feelings may not be openly displayed (Ettington, 1997) and may be tolerated and ignored by employers, ultimately to be made redundant or pressurised into early retirement.

As would be expected, some occupations and roles are more likely to fall into either linear or protean career types (Hall and Richter, 1990; Heslin, 2005) and certain jobs also may be perceived as age-typed (e.g. stereotypically young or old) or gender-typed (stereotypically masculine or feminine) (Goldberg et al., 2004). To a degree this may affect career plateauing although whether this largely results from an employer's unwillingness to overturn these stereotypes or an individual's own reluctance to attempt to breach these perceptual barriers has not been investigated. Similarly in situations where plateauing is still defined very much by objective career mobility, progress may vary according to what is commonly accepted as the meaning of "mobility" in a particular job type (Tremblay and Roger, 1993).

Relative position can also play a part: older managers may have more potential for upward mobility in upper levels of the organization than those at lower levels (Evans and Gilbert, 1984), whereas those who reach upper management before plateauing may be more likely to believe they have been successful in their career and better able

to accept the occurrence of the plateau (Allen et al., 1999). But whether acceptance of an externally imposed plateau occurs before or after an individual's own attempts at further career progression, and whether the two aspects are mutually incompatible, has not been made clear.

At the very top levels of management where some older individuals' value is paramount, the "rules" relating to further progression may be bent, which may go some way to explaining why some older managers still achieve exceptional ongoing success (Levinson , 2000).

2.4.2 Objective and subjective definitions and measures

In respect of career plateauing, several researchers have highlighted the distinction between *organizational plateauing* (lack of opportunity, or perceived lack of ability or desire to perform at a higher level) and *personal or job content plateauing* (lack of ability or desire to move, or absence of challenge in work responsibilities) (Appelbaum and Finestone, 1994; Loretto and White, 2006; Allen et al., 1999).

The latter concept (lack of desire to move) shifts the responsibility for objective progress to the employee and raises the question of whether an individual actually is "plateaued" if they are performing to a good or acceptable standard (FERENCE's *solid citizen*) but demonstrate the physical characteristics of a plateaued career and no longer seek promotion. A related issue which these studies seemingly fail to deal with is the extent to which an employer's *perception* of an individual's lack of desire for further progression represents a real objective barrier, regardless of that person's own motivation.

In studying the differences between those who are *hierarchically plateaued* and those who are *job content plateaued* Allen (1999) found that the latter reported lower levels of job performance, organizational commitment and job satisfaction plus higher intentions to leave than those who were hierarchically plateaued. From this she surmised that whereas hierarchical plateauing may be seen as an inevitable part of organizational life, it is felt that employers can do something to develop and improve *job content*. This study also raised a key point in suggesting that it is also possible to

be promoted yet not really change duties resulting in a situation where an individual would be *hierarchically progressing* but *job content plateaued*.

2.4.3 Summary

These studies intimate that career plateauing in older managers may result from the interaction of a number of complex objective and subjective variables within a changing employment context. Whilst conceptually linking notions of objective and subjective plateauing to traditional and new career models respectively, many studies seemingly fail to question the extent to which in traditional career contexts individuals may not operate solely in terms of physical, objective rewards, but exercise some of the attitudes and motivation that also apply to those who have a more boundaryless or protean orientation.

The rest of this chapter briefly examines some of the factors to which career plateauing is attributed, both in terms of employer policies and practices and employee motivation, attitudes and decisions.

2.5 Determinants of career plateauing

2.5.1 HR Management policies and practices

Historically employers have been seen as playing a defining role in career plateauing. Although contemporary career theories suggest an “all change” situation (Sullivan, 1999) evidence indicates that employers are still instrumental (Baruch, 2006).

Key employer influences on career plateauing include pay and promotion, training and development, performance management and age-related attitudes. Each is briefly considered below:

2.5.1.1 Pay, promotion and performance management

As mentioned above, career plateauing is traditionally held to be caused by withholding promotion with its associated pay rises and increases in job-related status. In part this may arise from employers' assumptions that older managers no longer wish to seek promotion and material reward in the same way as younger colleagues (Greller and Stroh, 1995).

Also, plateaued individuals who work longer and retire later exacerbate an existing problem: "*retirements create promotion opportunities for younger workers and enable enterprises to restructure without the practical and psychological difficulties of dismissing long-serving employees*" (Brennan et al., 1980, p.17). In the absence of wholesale early retirement employers are faced with having to deal with this problem in different ways.

Ideally decisions relating to pay and promotion will be made as part of appraisal and performance management systems but even so these may mask prejudice and erroneous assumptions (Ferris and King, 1992). Rupp et al (2006) found that older employees may receive more severe penalties (transfer or demotion) as a consequence of poor performance than younger colleagues who receive recommendations for training. Lawrence (1988) addressing the issue of "typical ages" for roles shows that the probability of receiving high performance ratings increases for managers who are seen as younger than perceived typical ages and decreases for managers who are seen as older.

A further contributory factor is the reluctance of younger managers to effectively address performance issues in older individuals (Finkelstein and Burke, 1998).

2.5.1.2 Training and Development

A body of evidence shows that older employees generally receive fewer training and development opportunities than younger colleagues placing them in a poor

competitive position (Loretto and White, 2006; McNair et al., 2004; Greller and Stroh, 2004).

Researchers suggest that this largely results from ageist stereotypes: that older employees are incapable of learning and performing in the same way as younger employees and have no interest or desire in further development, and that they represent a poor return on investment. Although these misconceptions have been refuted in a large body of evidence (Sterns and Miklos, 1995; Arnold, 1997) they remain pervasive (Loretto and White, 2006; Greller and Stroh, 2004).

2.5.1.3 Employer attitudes

Legislation was introduced in the UK to counteract age discrimination – where age is the deciding factor in employer decisions to recruit, promote, re-train or retire/dismiss an employee (Brennan et al., 2007). Nevertheless ‘ageism’: “*a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old*” (Butler and Lewis 1973, cited Bytheway, 1995, p.30) is still prevalent and entrenched (Loretto and White, 2006). A report by the CIPD (2007) indicated that although employers have taken steps to change policies, they have generally done little to address ageist workplace attitudes.

One of the difficulties in identifying ageist attitudes and the impact of chronological age upon careers is that “older age” is not an attribute that is either present or not as with gender or ethnicity, its meaning relies heavily on both context and individual self-image: “*Relatively little research has addressed the quite basic question of how workers will perceive themselves, or be perceived by others as old*” (Sterns and Miklos, 1995, p.256).

Furthermore, ageing happens to everyone including the most powerful group within the western workforce: able-bodied white males (Bytheway, 1995). Even if older managers avoid age stereotyping from their employers, evidence shows that the likelihood of re-employment decreases markedly over age 50 which affects notions of automatic mobility under boundaryless and protean career models (Daniel and Heywood, 2007).

2.5.1.4 Psychological contract

The psychological contract, an unwritten agreement between employers and employees embodying the expectations of both parties at an implicit level (Robinson et al., 1994) may be a key platform for the maintenance of career progress (Adamson et al., 1998).

At its most fundamental level the new employment context has “*destroyed the implicit labour contract linking seniority with security*” (Moen, 2005, p.189). Under the new contract, workers exchange performance for continuous learning and training so they may remain marketable (Sullivan et al., 1998). However as seen above, many older employees receive little or no training (Taylor, 2002). Further investigation is needed to reveal the extent to which employers feel that psychological contracts are breached by older employees who are unwilling to make changes.

Having looked at career theories and the effects of HR policies and practices we now consider how older managers’ individual attributes may impact career plateauing in later life.

2.5.2 Older managers’ individual attributes

In respect of individual career plateaus both objective (previous success, age, and education) and subjective (identity and individual personality) factors have been identified as playing a part (Tremblay, 1993). We review these and others below.

2.5.2.1 Identity

In today’s workplace numerous decisions are made, formally or informally, consciously or unconsciously, about when an individual worker becomes “older” and what that means in terms of how they should be treated. Variables relating to individual and social identity and the extent to which the adoption of an ageing identity, or the increasing relevance of this as a benchmark thus may be pertinent in determining career plateauing.

Unlike gender or ethnicity, ageing is an individual process and older people do not consistently, if at all, view themselves as part of a group defined primarily by their age (Bytheway, 1995). An individual's own view of themselves may not match the ageing identity (and its implications) bestowed upon them by others, in some cases they may be motivated to actively disprove what they perceive are the stereotypes (Sherman, 1994).

Gender is a key part of identity. Numerous studies have shown that women's career needs and drivers are quite dissimilar to those of men (Sturges, 1999; Gallos, 1989; Roberts and Friend, 1998). For example, Sturges' study showed that women managers were more likely than men to describe what success meant to them in terms of *internal criteria* whereas for men *position and pay* were seen as indispensable to career success, alongside *status*. Although in this study the "older" group were only in their forties, there is little reason to believe this would change for women in later years although men's career identity might alter to more closely mirror women's (Powell and Mainiero, 1992).

A further area of increasing relevance in the UK workplace is ethnicity and the effect this may have on later life career progression, particularly for older women, who may be in a position of 'double or triple jeopardy' experiencing combinations of gender, race and age discrimination (Goldberg et al., 2004; Greenhaus et al., 1990).

2.5.2.2 Motivation

Career plateauing has traditionally been equated with lack of employee motivation (Near, 1980) despite the fact that it has also been held to result from lack of employer-directed promotion. Despite this inconsistency there seems no doubt that later life career development is closely related to employee motivation and that objectively plateaued managers can be motivated to seek progress and satisfaction in ways which are meaningful to them (Sterns and Miklos, 1995).

The drivers which motivate older employees are complex (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). They may have a different perspective on work than younger people with survival needs likely to be less urgent (Sterns and Miklos, 1995). With age, factors

such as health, outside interests, and family and other responsibilities may have a greater and more diverse effect on individual motivation than in earlier years (Near, 1984). Motivation in older managers may be affected also by greater knowledge about the likelihood of effort paying off (Sterns and Miklos, 1995).

Traditional theories of motivation such as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's (1966) hygiene factors have focused on *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivators as independent variables. In career terms, extrinsic motivators are those which are external to the work itself, e.g. pay and benefits, profile and status, and working conditions; intrinsic motivators derive from the internal value of work to the individual, e.g. achievement, meaning, responsibility or autonomy. When considering what motivates older managers it may be helpful to look at a more synergistic combination (Amabile, 1993).

In one of the few papers to have examined the *qualitatively* different career experiences of managers, Sturges (1999) showed that for many the importance of material criteria for career success reduces with age to be replaced by an emphasis on factors such as influence and autonomy. She maintained that aspects of employment such as innate meaning, quality of relationships, inclusion, stimulation and continuing opportunity to contribute may become paramount in later years. In a comment which may help explain why even those who could advance further may prefer to become plateaued she surmised, "*Those managers who are 'successful' in hierarchical terms, may value external criteria for success less once they have achieved them*" (1999, p.250).

2.5.2.3 Financial position

Individual career decisions in later life can be financially based and driven by proximity to retirement. The extent to which they impact career plateauing is dependent on two variables: first, whether or not the individual has adequate or good pension provision (or other financial means) that will allow them to choose when to retire (Arnold, 1997). Second, their proximity to what they – and other people – regard as "retirement age" and the degree to which they start to see themselves in these terms (Karp, 1987).

These can lead to entirely different outcomes: in practice some will accept a plateaued situation and keep working in the same position rather than endanger their pension rights (Sterns and Miklos, 1995), whereas others may be forced or tempted into job or career changes both to increase their income and sustain what they envisage will be a considerably extended working life (Kooij et al., 2008). Those who define themselves as ‘pre-retired’ may simply cease to seek further progress (Ettington, 1998).

2.5.2.4 Health

Stereotypes about older individuals’ inevitable descent into ill-health in later life still abound (Sherman, 1994) and may impact employer decisions concerning individual promotion and development (Taylor, 2002); it is a common determinant in retirement decisions among older workers (Loretto and White, 2006). Ailments which prevent older managers from effective job performance will tend to curb both employer- and employee-driven career progress and may result in individuals with chronic health conditions choosing to operate on a plateaued level up to early retirement (Tremblay et al., 1995).

One health-related aspect which may be growing in frequency and importance for older managers is that of stress and burn-out which have been found to be linked to career plateauing in earlier careers (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001). Some older individuals may selectively downscale their ambition in order to better withstand stress and to avoid burnout as their energy levels start to slow. In doing so they may be deciding that their greater usefulness – to themselves, their colleagues and their employer – lies in remaining *in situ* and pacing themselves (Baltes and Baltes 1990).

2.5.2.5 Family and other external influences

This is a wide-ranging area focusing on how the various aspects of an individual’s life outside the workplace may influence career decisions. Studies have examined the extent to which older individuals may develop a greater orientation towards improved work life balance, the role played in this by spouses - particularly in relation to establishing a retirement date, and the role of external responsibilities and obligations

such as providing financial support and care for older dependants or grandchildren (Greller and Simpson, 1999; Near, 1984). However there is no evidence of how and under what circumstances, these consistently impact older managers' career progression – these are no doubt individual decisions yet at the same time may be heavily influenced by cultural and societal influences.

2.6 Preliminary conclusions

This scoping study has revealed that much existing research focuses either on the validity of objective definitions and measures of careers, or on examining the consequences of plateauing, with little directed towards investigating the subjective variables that might contribute towards career plateauing in later life (Allen et al., 1999).

Despite evidence suggesting that plateauing can be both an *objective* and *subjective* experience, researchers have focused primarily on *physical* mobility as an indicator and measure (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006). Little evidence exists as to how subjective, *psychological* factors contribute and exactly *what matters* to older managers in the later stages of their careers. There is little to clarify whether a career plateau, traditionally considered a negative phenomenon results, in fact, from employer-created *circumstance* or employee-driven *choice*.

Many studies have commented that career theory has largely represented the male experience even though evidence indicates that women's career progress, development and drivers may differ greatly (Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Gallos, 1989; Roberts and Friend, 1998). Further investigation is needed to identify how and in what ways these changes are manifest.

HR policies and practices and the degree to which they recognize the fundamental needs and wants of older managers - in particular for ongoing training and development - have been shown to contribute significantly to plateauing in older managers in the past. However what is less clear is the role they now play in practice in contemporary career environments, their effect once an older manager has become

plateaued, and why such policies and practices only affect some and not all older managers.

Attempts by researchers to isolate and measure the significance of individual variables or groups of variables relating to later life career plateauing have simply highlighted the complexity of the situation. On one level there is an interplay amongst age, individual, situational, motivational and involvement constructs (Maurer et al., 2003), while on a more practical plane complex personal and financial issues interact to influence older employee's expectations of work in later life. Both operate within a multifaceted context including culture and peer influences (Loretto and White, 2006).

The variables which appear to be pertinent in the literature are represented in Figure 2 below:

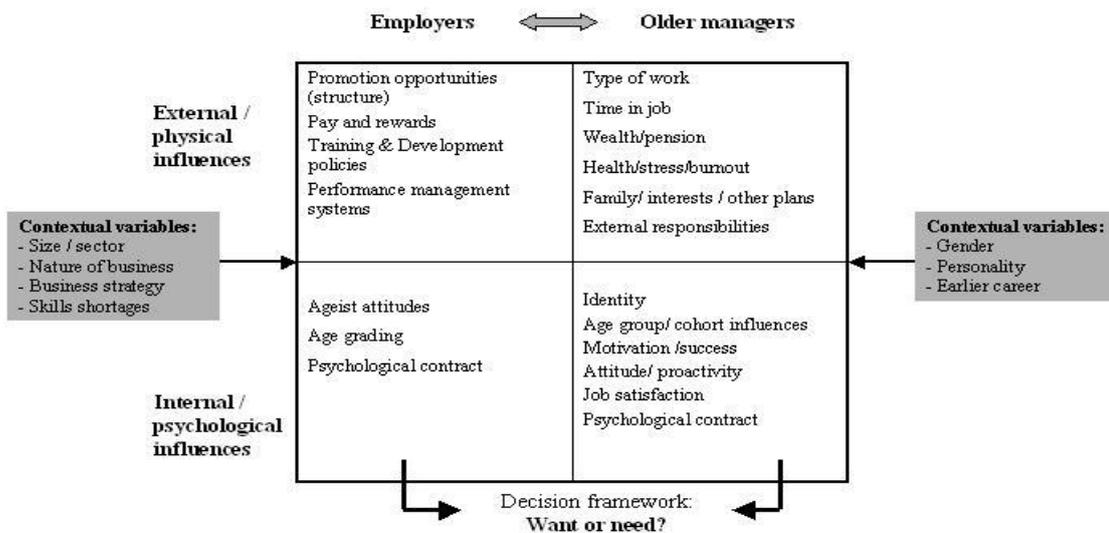


Figure 2 The determinants of career plateauing in older managers

2.7 Questions for systematic review

Overall, the findings from this scoping study indicate that existing life and career stage theories fail to account adequately for the occurrence of career plateauing in older managers, particularly in terms of the relevant psychological determinants. The implication of some studies (Ettington, 1998; Tremblay et al., 1995) is that older managers may not consider themselves plateaued if they are still able to achieve goals related to their own definitions of ongoing progress, success and satisfaction, but it appears that little is known about how this operates what factors are important.

Therefore the review which follows will examine the phenomenon of career plateauing in older managers specifically investigating two explicit questions:

RQI: What are the psychological determinants of career plateauing in older managers?

How do individual variables such as personality, self-image, motivation, goals and self-efficacy affect career plateauing in managers aged 50 and above?

RQII: In what ways do they differ by gender?

How are psychological determinants of career plateauing experienced differently by men and women?

3 Method

3.1 Overview

The literature review is fundamental to the process of academic research. Its purpose is not only to identify one or more gaps in existing knowledge thereby generating specific questions to be addressed by the researcher’s empirical study, it also helps inform the nature of that study through establishing understanding of various terms and definitions in different contexts, comparing and contrasting practical and philosophical approaches, and evaluating the use of different methodologies.

This review will examine the two areas of literature identified in the earlier scoping study: *Career theory* and *Older Managers’ individual attributes* as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

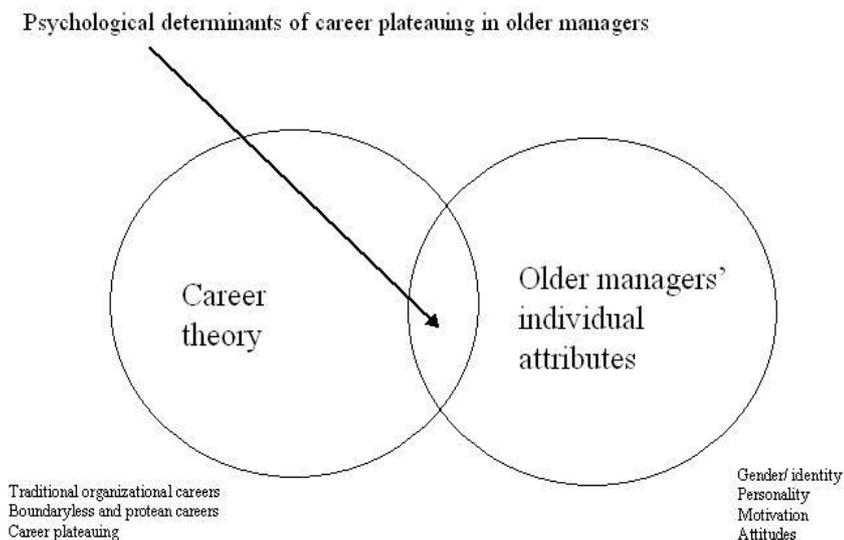


Figure 3 The bodies of literature under review

Within these areas it has already been identified that much is heavily influenced by researchers’ individual philosophical and methodological perspectives and divergent

approaches in terms of values and meaning. The adoption of the systematic review process will help address the lack of clarity which currently exists in the field, producing one or more research questions which will have relevance and validity for academics and practitioners alike.

3.2 Personal statement

For numerous reasons many of the issues surrounding older workers are comparatively new and unresearched; their implications are yet to be fully realised. However, in the future due to demographic, economic, social and legal pressures, the demand for solid information on which employers, government and other policy makers and employees themselves can base strategies and decisions, is likely to be huge and I have an enthusiastic interest in being involved in some small part in providing this.

Having now reached the age of being an ‘older manager’ myself gives me a personal link to the topic, but no particular agenda other than interest in improving my understanding of older managers’ careers in the hope it will inform future practice. Much of my interest in this area has been generated by working with older managers in recent years as a consultant, executive coach and trainer. This has highlighted the extreme complexity of the situation in terms of such factors as employer and employee motivation, attitudes and aspirations, and the need to consider the perspectives of both parties against a background of considerable organizational and personal change.

In terms of possible bias I am aware that as a member of this cohort I must guard against personal views and experiences influencing my perceptions and I will ensure that this is incorporated as an important element of researcher reflexivity.

3.3 Conceptual discussion of the problem

As with all research, clarity about underlying concepts is crucial and in this context the need to consider the meaning of “older” age, and the need to study how individuals interact with their world, are of particular importance.

Following Greller and Simpson (1999) and others this review uses age 50 and over to represent late career and the meaning of “older” in the term “older managers”. A number of different words representing the concept of ‘older’ are used in the literature search producing a variety of definitions across different studies.

The terminology of age can be confusing: many US studies focusing on ‘baby boomers’ (a US term now used to define the 50 – 70 age group) were in fact older papers considering the mid-life issues of this group who were then in their thirties to forties.

Researchers have frequently used age as a measure of convenience, for instance in a study by Pogson et al. (2003) career stage was operationalized in terms of age *“because the literature suggests age is one of the simplest and most effective methods of defining career stage”*; difficulties then arose in terms of separating the two influences from cohort or generational effects. In fact as van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch (2008, p.126) state and many other studies infer, *“Age ... is actually quite a fuzzy variable containing time, generation, tenure and selection effects”*; its meaning depends much on context.

Kooij et al. (2008) present a typology comprising chronological (calendar) age; functional (performance-based) age; psychosocial or subjective age; organizational age; and the lifespan concept of age. These distinctions may be significant for future research investigating how psychological determinants of career plateauing may change with age. Findings may vary depending on the *type* of age used as benchmark.

As well as “age” many other socially-constructed terms occur in the literature such as ‘seniority’, ‘progress’, and ‘status’, all of which can have varying significance across different individuals, groups and organizations.

Ultimately it seems that clarity will not be obtained from understanding career plateauing in the employment context, and separately understanding the meaning of career plateauing to an individual, rather it will result from understanding the two elements in interaction.

3.4 Consultation panel

The systematic review process cannot be conducted in isolation; the benefit of expert input from specialists who can advise on matters relating to content and form is invaluable. The panel of proposed experts is detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Panel of experts

Name	Organisation	Role
Dr Emma Parry	Cranfield School of Management	Supervisor
Dr Clare Kelliher	Cranfield School of Management	Supervisor’s mentor
Dr Noeleen Docherty	Cranfield School of Management	Internal advisor - careers
Dr David Denyer	Cranfield School of Management	Review process advisor
Ms Heather Woodfield	Cranfield University Library	Literature search advisor
Dr Wendy Loretto	University of Edinburgh	Advisor on older workers/managers
Dr Val Singh	Cranfield School of Management	Advisor on women’s careers
Dr Sherry Sullivan Associate Professor	Bowling Green State University, Ohio	Advisor on Boundaryless and Protean career theories

Unfortunately due to time constraints and availability not all were able to provide input within the timescale required for submitting this paper. However, their views will continue to be sought throughout the development of the PhD research exercise.

Dr Emma Parry provided invaluable guidance and input throughout the exercise in terms of both content and form, as did Dr Clare Kelliher.

Dr David Denyer and Ms Heather Woodfield provided useful input through seminars and workshops as well as responding to individual queries regarding the systematic review process.

Dr Noeleen Docherty and Dr Val Singh provided useful input and referred papers.

Informal feedback was also received from Dr Mike Healey from the University of Westminster Business School responding to a paper on this subject presented at their mature@eu project workshop in June 2008. Input was also received from Dr Stephen Gourlay from Kingston University, an expert in qualitative methods, following discussion at the 1998 EDAMBA conference in July 2008.

A limitation in the composition of this panel is the absence of employer/HR practitioner input which is a recognised bias. Steps will be taken to rectify this in future.

3.5 Search strategy

The questions which this review addresses are as follows:

RQI: What are the psychological determinants of career plateauing in older managers?

RQII: In what ways do they differ by gender?

This section outlines the strategy adopted in searching for key papers, assessing them for relevance and quality, and data extraction procedures.

3.5.1 Keywords and search strings

The following key words were selected in order to conduct database searches:

AGE:

Age*, aging, old*, over 50*, over fift*, baby boomer*, mature, middle aged, middle-aged, senior,

MANAGER

manager*, employee*, work*, profession*

PLATEAU

plateau*, stage*, cycle*, decline, barrier*, obsolete, stagnat*, block

DETERMINANTS

determinant*, cause*, driver*, antecedent*, reason*, perception*

MOTIVATION

motivation, job satisfaction, driver*, aim*, goal*, objective*, plan*, attitude*, aspiration*, incentive*

IDENTITY

identit*, personalit*, image, character*, trait*, qualit*, nature, disposition

GENDER:

gender*, sex, wom?n, m?n, male, female

Table 3 Justification for inclusion

CONCEPT	KEY WORDS	JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION
CAREER	Career*	An initial search on “older manager*+

		<p>career*” identified 5724 papers. This being the case, it was decided not to broaden out the concept of “career” any further. Not only did this seem a potentially overwhelming number, but it was important to locate the research within the careers literature rather than encompassing general jobs or occupations. A different approach would have been taken had “career*” not identified so many papers.</p>
AGE:	<p>Age*, aging, old*, over 50*, over fift*, baby boomer*, mature, middle-aged, senior.</p>	<p>“Age” in isolation is an insufficient term for these purposes as it applies to age as a concept rather than older age. Also provision must be made for different UK and US spellings, e.g. “ageing” and “aging”. The terms “over 50” and “baby boomer” are chosen in order to specify the particular age range of interest, however as preliminary searches revealed that specific ages are not consistent across studies of “older” managers, the most commonly used terms from the literature to cover those who are no longer young have also been included, e.g. “mature”, “middle aged” and “senior”.</p>
MANAGER	<p>manager*, employee*, work*, profession*</p>	<p>As preliminary searches established that relatively little research has been undertaken into the careers of older managers <i>per se</i>, this has been extended to include “employees”, “workers” and “professionals”. Such studies may include older managers as a sub-category or provide material relevant to older managers.</p>

PLATEAU	plateau*, stage*, cycle*, decline, barrier*, obsolete, stagnat*, block	<p>“Plateau” or “plateauing” is a term which is specific to careers literature but is not necessarily used by practitioners or those working outside the careers research arena. Thus terms are included which represent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the career “stage” concept, and b) the “stagnation” connotations of plateauing.
DETERMINANTS	determinant*, cause*, driver*, antecedent*, reason*, perception*	<p>As “determinants” is a very specific term, other words are needed to cover possible antecedents (again not a very common term), in order to identify studies which investigate links between the concepts of age and career plateauing whether or not that is a causal link. Synonyms were chosen from a dictionary and thesaurus search.</p>
MOTIVATION	motivation, job satisfaction, driver*, aim*, goal*, objective*, plan*, attitude*, aspiration*, incentive*	<p>Preliminary searches have identified that little has been written about older workers’ career motivation as an isolated variable. Additional terms are used based on likely personal psychological attributes which may be related. These are derived from terms which emerged from preliminary searches.</p>
IDENTITY	identit*, personalit*, image, character*, trait*, qualit*, nature, disposition	<p>“Age” as a concept is one of a number of variables that contribute towards individual identity. This is particularly true of older individuals who may or may not choose to incorporate age and age stereotypes into their self-image. Identity also covers such attributes as personality, qualities, traits, characteristics, nature and disposition. These</p>

		words were chosen from a thesaurus search.
GENDER:	gender*, sex, wom?n, m?n, male, female	A selection of common terms which represent gender differences.

These terms were then combined into five different search strings in order to investigate key psychological aspects of career plateauing in older managers, as identified from the initial scoping study review. The relationship of search strings to review questions is demonstrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Search strings

Construct	Search strings	Focus of question
Older managers' career plateauing	Career* AND (Age* OR aging, OR old* OR over 50* OR over fift* OR baby boomer* OR mature OR middle age* OR middle-age* OR senior*) AND (manager* OR employee* OR work* OR profession*) AND (plateau* OR stage* OR cycle* OR decline OR barrier* OR obsolete OR stagnat* OR block)	What is known about career plateauing in older managers?
Determinants of older managers' career plateauing	Career* AND (Age* OR aging, OR old* OR over 50* OR over fift* OR baby boomer* OR mature OR middle age* OR middle-age* OR senior*) AND (manager* OR employee* OR work* OR profession*) AND (plateau* OR stage* OR cycle* OR decline OR barrier* OR obsolete OR stagnat* OR block) AND (determinant*OR cause* OR driver* OR antecedent*OR reason* OR perception*)	Which factors contribute towards the occurrence of career plateauing in older managers?
Older managers' career plateauing and motivation	Career* AND (Age* OR aging, OR old* OR over 50* OR over fift* OR baby boomer* OR mature OR middle age* OR middle-age* OR senior*) AND	What is the relationship between motivation and career plateauing in older managers?

	(manager* OR employee* OR work* OR profession*) AND (plateau* OR stage* OR cycle* OR decline OR barrier* OR obsolete OR stagnat* OR block) AND (plan* OR development OR advancement OR progress* OR pre-retirement) AND (motivation OR job satisfaction OR driver* OR aim* OR goal* OR objective*OR plan* OR attitude* OR aspiration* OR incentive*)	
Older managers' identity and career plateauing	Career* AND (Age* OR aging, OR old* OR over 50* OR over fift* OR baby boomer* OR mature OR middle age* OR middle-age* OR senior*) AND (manager* OR employee* OR work* OR profession*) AND (identit* OR personalit* OR image OR character* OR trait* OR qualit* OR nature OR disposition) AND (plateau* OR stage* OR cycle* OR decline OR barrier* OR obsolete OR stagnat* OR block)	Why is the relationship between career plateauing in older managers and a number of psychological variables specific to each individual?
Older managers' career plateauing and gender	Career* AND (Age* OR aging, OR old* OR over 50* OR over fift* OR baby boomer* OR mature OR middle age* OR middle-age* OR senior*) AND (manager* OR employee* OR work* OR profession*) AND (plateau* OR stage* OR cycle* OR decline) AND (plan* OR development OR advancement OR progress* OR pre-retirement)AND (gender*OR sex OR wom?n OR m?n OR male OR female)	How and in what ways does career plateauing in older managers differ by gender?

3.5.2 Databases

The following databases were used. The first two were most useful for finding information relating to careers literature. PsycINFO was most relevant for topics relating to psychological determinants such as older worker identity, motivation, attitudes, etc.

Table 5. Databases

Database	Content and justification
ABI/INFORM Global	This is one of the most comprehensive business databases on the market including in-depth coverage for over 2,890 publications, with more than 1,920 available in full text. Covers management techniques, business trends, management practice and theory, corporate strategy and tactics, and competitive landscape.
EBSCO Business Source Premier	Calling itself ‘the world's definitive scholarly business database’, EBSCO has the leading collection of bibliographic and full text content including indexing and abstracts for more than 1,200 of the most important scholarly business journals.
PsycINFO	PsycINFO provides access to over 1,800 professional journals, chapters, books, reports, theses and dissertations, published internationally. As well as its depth of psychological coverage it holds literature from an array of disciplines related to psychology such as psychiatry, education, business, law, linguistics, and social work. dissertations, published internationally. Additionally, there are more than 8 million cited references in 185,000 journal articles, books, and book chapters.
Google Scholar	Google Scholar tends to produce a higher number of articles and references in response to searches due to its less rigorous filtering system. As a result it is a useful way of finding cross-referenced material or author information or tracking down articles that other databases have omitted.

Other databases such as Blackwell Synergy, Science Direct and Emerald Full Text were accessed on occasion as a result of using the Cranfield SFX (Search, find and extract) service. Web of Knowledge was utilised for checking citations and references. ProQuest alerts were set up for the above search strings to generate daily email messages concerning new material.

3.5.3 Additional information sources

The following sources were considered eligible as information sources. In practice, not all sources revealed pertinent material.

Table 6. Additional sources of material

Source	Reason for use
Books	Often provide a good overview of a topic area - can be good at linking together various perspectives and often have useful introductory summaries/prefaces.
Professional and practitioner journals, websites and internet documents	A good source of up-to-date comment, but only if supported by high quality empirical research.
Working papers or unpublished papers	New perspectives and data less than three years old which may be interesting and thought-provoking even if untested.
Conference papers	As above.
Theses	As above (particularly good for reviews of related literature).
Reports and policy documents	Reports supported by good quality empirical research often provide good data and useful summaries of statistical information e.g. Government, EC, Charities.

3.5.4 Cross-referencing

Databases are neither all-inclusive nor infallible in content and some useful and relevant material was found through cross-referencing, following up papers cited by authors. In a situation such as this where the review questions under consideration require the analysis of wide-ranging areas of literature this can be a helpful process as

it helps build up a body of evidence outwards from the central topic, rather than narrowing down large volumes of material.

Any material accessed via this process was subjected to the same inclusion/exclusion and quality appraisal as papers accessed via database searches.

3.6 Selection criteria

3.6.1 Inclusion criteria

The following criteria relate to the initial basis on which studies were included or excluded from further analysis at the stage of initial database search results:

Table 7. Basic Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Include:	Reason
Academic papers, conference papers, working papers, theses – published and from online repositories.	Major sources of academic research and theory. Work in progress or unpublished work may provide the most up to date thinking on the concept, covering material produced within the past three years.
Large and small companies, public, private and not for profit organisations, the professions.	A broad brush approach is needed as little research appears to have been done on ‘older managers’ in the UK in respect of career plateauing.
Quantitative and qualitative studies.	Important to document the range of methodological approaches that have been adopted in existing studies.
Exclude:	Reason
Research undertaken outside the Western economy.	Potentially too many cultural, demographic, social and economic differences.
Research in a foreign language.	It is felt that as significant studies relate to Western economies, those of any importance would be available in English. Also the researcher is only fluent in English.
Pure gerontological research	Research relating to biological ageing processes which are unrelated to workplace issues (i.e. this study is only

	concerned with how, if at all, the effects of biological age may impact upon later life working).
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The application of inclusion/exclusion criteria was a key stage in eliminating irrelevant and poor quality papers.

Table 8 below provides justification for the rationale used in deriving and applying inclusion/exclusion criteria to identify papers of key significance from those generated by the search results and how those criteria were applied to each paper.

Table 8. Justification for inclusion/exclusion criteria

	High	Medium	Low	N/a	Justification for application of exclusion/inclusion criteria
Who? (Subject group)	Older managers	Older workers (clearly specified)	Older workers (clearly specified)	(older) people – not workers	Key area of focus is older managers. Secondary area of focus are clearly defined groups of older workers from which it may be able to extrapolate some data relevant to older managers e.g. studies concerning age bands of workers in a specific organization or industry type. Research about older people is not relevant as the locus of

					investigation is on work-related experiences.
	Male and female	Male or female	male	Not specified	One review question focuses on gender differences in career plateauing. Thus it is especially important to retain papers which have a clearly defined gendered research sample. As this is one of the most basic descriptors of individuals, any paper which fails to specify the gender of its sample would not be sufficiently robust to warrant inclusion.
	Aged 50 and over	Middle-aged or mid-career	All ages	Young	The focus of the review question is on individuals aged over 50. However some research studies use different criteria for “older age”, whilst some have chosen to use age bands as a basis for comparison. All of these have some relevance. Those which only look at

					young individuals do not.
When? (date of paper)	1990 - present	1970 - 1989	1950-1969	Prior to 1950	The workplace and the nature of careers has changed a great deal in the 68 years since 1950 such that the economic, social and workplace environment of that time now has little practical relevance for the consideration of twenty first century careers. 1950 was chosen as a start point as Super's work on the psychology of careers was published in 1957. Since then this has been criticised for lack of contemporary relevance particularly with the emergence of boundaryless and protean career theories in the 1990s.
Where? (Location of study)	UK	US/Canada/ Western Europe/Australasia	Western - unspecified	Non-western economy	The notion of age can have radically different cultural connotations which

					<p>is why research in non-Western societies is excluded. The review questions focus on UK managers, however acceptably relevant parallels are likely to exist in studies undertaken in other western economies. Where the location of the study or the sample is not made evident, this is likely to be indicative of poor quality research.</p>
<p>How? (method)</p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>Qualitative and Quantitative</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>Not specified</p>	<p>NB: This criterion was not applied in the case of literature reviews and similar theoretical papers.</p> <p>As my focus is on the qualitatively different experiences of older managers, qualitative papers are of most relevance. However, as little research has been undertaken from a purely qualitative perspective, other</p>

					papers must also be considered for potential usefulness. Those not specifying a method are unlikely to be high quality papers.
Why? Epistemological /ontological perspective	Interpretative /constructionist	Realist	Positivist	Not specified	As my own approach is interpretivist these are the papers likely to be most relevant. Other approaches may also be relevant. Those where no justification or clarification of approach is given or able to be ascertained are likely not to be good quality papers for the purpose of this review.

3.6.2 Relevance

The second stage of screening comprised citation and abstract review. At this stage a number of factors relating to relevance were taken into account in selecting papers for inclusion. Table 9 below lists these criteria.

Table 9 Relevance criteria

	High	Medium	Low	N/a
Who? (Subject group)	Older managers	Older workers (clearly specified)	Older workers (clearly specified)	(older) people – not workers
	Male and female	Male or female	male	Not specified
	Aged 50 and over	Middle-aged or mid-career	All ages	Young
When? (date of paper)	1990 - present	1970 - 1989	1950-1969	Prior to 1950
Where? (Location of study)	UK	US/Canada/ Western Europe/Australasia	Western - unspecified	Non-western economy
How? (method)	Qualitative	Qualitative and Quantitative	Quantitative	Not specified
Why? Epistemological /ontological perspective	Interpretative /constructionist	Realist	Positivist	Not specified

Papers rated N/A were excluded. All others were then subjected to quality appraisal.

3.7 Quality appraisal

3.7.1 Quality evaluation criteria

A system of quality ratings was devised in order to identify those papers which would comprise the key platform on which to base the systematic review. As initial pilot searches had shown there to be little highly relevant research available and that material would be diverse in theoretical and methodological approach, it was decided at the scoping study review stage that it would be inappropriate to devise a system based purely on a numerical rating system as would be the case if large numbers of papers were under consideration. This being so the quality ratings (see Table 11

below) represent my own attempt to identify those aspects of a paper which would be most likely to be evident in the best studies of papers in any field.

Quality was therefore assessed based on an in-depth qualitative evaluation of individual full papers based on a number of judgements of quality. In overall form these were based on Rose's (1982) ABCDE model:

- A. Theory: an explanatory statement about a social phenomenon.
- B. Theoretical proposition: specific proposition to be investigated in the study.
- C. Operationalization: decisions about method, data collection technique, sampling, concepts and indicators, variables, units.
- D. Fieldwork: data collection, problems of implementing stage 3 decisions
- E. Results: data analysis leading to findings; interpretations feeding back to C, B and A.

Specific quality criteria that were applied are as follows:

3.7.1.1 Quality criteria for empirical papers:

- Clear discussion of the issue, the background and its relationship to theory and practice.
- Comprehensive literature review and critical analysis of relevant theoretical arguments.
- Clearly reported research design and links to key theories and philosophical approaches.
- Adequate detail about sample and data collection techniques.
- Unambiguous reporting of findings with explanation of appropriate graphs, and tables.
- Satisfactory discussion of the findings in terms of relating back to the original issue and including limitations of the study.
- Conclusions linked to original issue, with recommendations for further research.
- Overall exhibition of extent of knowledge, methodological rigour and strength of argument.
- Clear indication of contribution to the field

3.7.1.2 Quality criteria for conceptual papers:

- Valid initial statement of the purpose of the paper and its intended contribution.
- Clear discussion of the issue, the background and its relationship to theory and practice.
- Comprehensive review of relevant philosophical and methodological theories and approaches backed up by literature citations.
- Clear representation of what the paper proposes, ideally with diagrammatic representation (if a new model).
- Persuasive suggestions as to how the model or theory might be utilised and applied in theory and practice.
- Strengths and weaknesses and limitations of the theory or model.
- Recommendations for further research, either conceptually extending the paper or applying the model or theory.
- Overall exhibition of extent of knowledge and strength of argument.
- Clear indication of contribution to the field

Quality data for each paper were judged and recorded in terms of a rating scale - from not applicable to high - as demonstrated below. This was kept as a paper record attached to each article print out.

Table 10 Quality ratings for papers

Quality criteria	N/a	Low	Medium	High
	Non-existent	inadequate	reasonable	excellent
Empirical papers				
Clear discussion of the issue, the background and its relationship to theory and practice.				
Comprehensive literature review and critical analysis of relevant theoretical arguments.				
Clearly reported research design and links to key theories and philosophical approaches.				
Adequate detail about sample and data collection techniques				

Unambiguous reporting of findings with explanation of appropriate graphs, and tables.

Satisfactory discussion of the findings in terms of relating back to the original issue and including limitations of the study.

Conclusions linked to original issue, with recommendations for further research.

Overall exhibition of extent of knowledge, methodological rigour and strength of argument.

Clear indication of contribution to the field.

Conceptual papers

Valid initial statement of the purpose of the paper and its intended contribution.

Clear discussion of the issue, the background and its relationship to theory and practice.

Comprehensive review of relevant philosophical and methodological theories and approaches backed up by literature citations.

Clear representation of what the paper proposes, ideally with diagrammatic representation (if a new model).

Persuasive suggestions as to how the model or theory might be utilised and applied in theory and practice.

Strengths and weaknesses and limitations of the theory or model.

Recommendations for further research, either conceptually extending the paper or applying the model or theory.

Overall exhibition of extent of knowledge and strength of argument.

Clear indication of contribution to the field.

Only papers which received the majority of ratings as medium or high were retained.

3.8 Data extraction

Data relating to quality was recorded on individual article summaries on Refworks using modified fields in order to achieve sufficient flexibility. Refworks was chosen over other methods of data recording as it has the advantage of keeping all information relating to a paper in one place, including the journal abstract, as well as being searchable by topic area, author, etc. A sample record is shown in Table 11 below (this does not cover all the fields that Refworks records automatically illustrating how the quality rating criteria were applied (see column 3 for comments). As this example was a conceptual paper, the second set of criteria shown above were applied. The example represents the record for the paper kept on Refworks and thus includes such criteria as geographic location, journal quality, etc which were fields being included for purposes outside the pure quality review. A number of quality fields were included under the methodological approach factor and these were aggregated to give a final score which was shown under “Quality ranking according to criteria analysis” – see below. This score was then combined with the scores for the quality criteria listed next to “summary content” to give the final rating shown next to the “overall rating” column. In this way, some of the criteria were given more importance than others.

Table 11 An example of a summary paper analysis on Refworks

Variable	Relevant criteria	Justification for inclusion	Quality criteria scores
Paper:	Maurer, Todd J, (2001). Career-relevant learning and development, worker age, and beliefs about self-efficacy for development. <i>Journal of Management</i> , 2, 123 –134.	It is evident from the title that this paper is likely to be highly pertinent.	
Aspect:			
Quality of journal (Cranfield SOM)	4*	A high quality journal	
Frequency of citation	25	Fairly good number of	

		citations by other researchers.	
Area of focus	Workplace learning and development in older individuals.	Clear statement of purpose of paper and intended contribution.	Criteria 1 - high
Geographical focus	US	Medium relevance – score 2	
Methodological approach	Conceptual paper	Clear discussion of issue, background and relationship to theory and practice. Comprehensive review of relevant philosophical and methodological theories. Clear representation of what the paper proposes	Criteria 2 – high Criteria 3 – high Criteria 4 - medium
Overall relevance to review question High/Medium/Low/Not	High	Highly relevant paper in terms of exclusion/inclusion criteria.	
Generalisability High/Medium/Low/Not	High	How model/theory might be applied in theory/practice.	Criteria 5 - high
Quality ranking according to criteria analysis High/Medium/Low/Not	High		Score for above criteria High
Summary content	Self-efficacy (an individual characteristic which can be changed or improved) may play a role in learning and development behaviour independent of participation. Looks at task self-efficacy, domain self-efficacy, and general self-efficacy - ones overall self-confidence for dealing with multiple domains in life. (Self efficacy for development is one's confidence in learning totally new things or developing new skills). Examines how mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, persuasion and physiological influences	Strengths and weaknesses / limitations of model. Recommendations for further research Overall exhibition of extent of knowledge and strength of argument Clear indication of contribution to field	Criteria 6 – high Criteria 7 – high Criteria 8 – high Criteria 9 - high

	adversely affect self-efficacy with age. Voluntary participation in development activities by ageing employees is an increasingly crucial behaviour to understand - choice to participate rather than performance results is the important variable.		
Comments	Excellent review of this topic, not apparently covered by other theorists. Up to date in terms of contemporary context.		
Overall rating			High

3.9 Synthesis

Undertaking a Systematic Review process is similar in nature to qualitative research on the literature itself. It involves having to apply a number of different processes: searching for literature, initial reviews of relevance and quality, assessing the contribution that the paper makes to the theoretical and/or practical knowledge relating to the questions under consideration and identifying those key elements of the paper that are worth highlighting for future use.

As with research the objectives are twofold:

- 1 Synthesizing each new finding with existing data in an interactive process in order to build the framework for a robust, persuasive, credible and potentially valuable argument based on high quality existing research and theory, and
- 2 Revisiting and refining the nature of that argument as necessary throughout the review process in order to accommodate each new finding of relevance as it comes to light.

The ability to achieve this whilst still adhering to a rigorous, transparent and potentially replicable process is a considerable challenge involving the application of the researcher's own views and judgment in analyzing the data and forming conclusions.

The next two chapters outline the results of the processes detailed in this section.

4. Descriptive findings

The review questions which were addressed are as follows:

- RQI: What are the psychological determinants of career plateauing in older managers?
- RQII: In what ways do they differ by gender?

The area of literature pertaining to older manager's individual attributes i.e. that informing decisions about the psychological determinants of career plateauing was quite difficult to access.

Many studies focus on a particular determinant with age as only a secondary, and vaguely defined factor, if present at all. Others are about "older workers" as a generic group, but may not contain material specifically relevant to older managers. Some studies are broad in their focus covering hundreds or thousands of subjects across different organizations' others are limited and contextually very specific. As a result it was necessary to consider quite a wide range of material in this area even though the focus of interest was specifically *managers aged 50 and above*.

Details of doubts, exceptions, justifications and anomalies were all recorded on individual Refworks records as each paper was reviewed in order to provide an audit trail of decision making concerning inclusion and relevance and quality criteria.

4.1 Data extraction

This section outlines the results from the application of the extraction and analysis methods detailed in the previous chapter.

Database searches on "older managers" and "older managers' careers" generated many thousands of papers. Searches were therefore restricted to more specific search strings as outlined in Chapter 3, which produced manageable numbers of papers which could be individually scanned. Searches were saved and de-duplicated,

producing a body of material to be individually appraised – as detailed in Table 12 below:

Table 12 Sources of key papers

Total search output from Proquest, Ebsco, PsycInfo:	5724
Total papers remaining when de-duplicated - then assessed for relevance	1963
Total remaining when assessed for relevance – then assessed for quality	298
Total papers meeting basic quality criteria	98
Total papers receiving majority of medium/high quality scores	26
Additional material analysed:	
Cross refs	21
Existing papers	12
Additional recommendations	3
Final total of papers:	52

A record of data relating to each search was kept as a table on Word.

4.2 Journals

An analysis of literature by type, geographic location, citation rate and journal quality was kept on an Excel spreadsheet. Data from this is outlined below:

- a) Types of papers and geographical source are as follows:

Table 13 Types of research paper

Type of paper	Number of papers
Quantitative	24
Qualitative	5
Quantitative and Qualitative	2
Theoretical paper	18
Literature review	3
Conference paper	0
Total	52

As can be seen, there is a high number of conceptual papers and very little qualitative material.

Table 14 Papers by geographical location

Country	Number of papers
US	35
UK	6
Canada	4
Germany	2
Netherlands	2
Australia	2
Sweden	1

b) Journals and their quality are outlined below. Judgement was exercised in including some papers from unranked journals (using the Cranfield School of Management list) if they were felt otherwise to be of high quality and highly relevant.

Table 15 Journal source

Journal	Number of papers
Academy of Management Executive	1
Academy of Management Review	4
Aging and Human Development	1
British Journal of Management	2
Business Horizons	1
Career Development International	2
Community work and family	1
European Journal of Work and organizational Psychology	1
Group and Organization Management	1
Human Development	1
Human Relations	1
Human Resource Management	1
Human Resource Management Journal	1
Human Resource Management Review	4
International Journal of Human Resource Management	1
Journal of Applied Psychology	1
Journal of Business Ethics	1
Journal of Management	5
Journal of Managerial Psychology	5
Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	1
Journal of Organizational Behavior	4
Journal of Organizational Change Management	1
Journal of Vocational Behavior	5
Personnel Psychology	1
Public Personnel Management	1
Qualitative Sociology	1
Social Forces	1
Social Policy and Society	1
Women in Management Review	1

Table 16 Quality ranking of papers by journal quality

	Journal ranking	4*	3*	2*	1*	0
Paper quality	High (26)	11	8	4	2	1
	Medium (26)	7	1	3	7	8

c) Papers were also analysed by date of publication.

Table 17 Papers by publication date

Date	Number of papers	No of books
1975 - 1979	1	
1980 - 1984	4	
1985 - 1989	2	1
1990 - 1994	11	
1995 -1999	15	3
2000 – 2004	7	
2005 – 2008	12	

5. Conceptual findings

RQ1: What are the psychological determinants of career plateauing in older managers?

RQ2: In what ways do they differ by gender?

This section will address the review questions outlined above by examining what the literature has revealed to be the psychological variables relating to career plateauing in the context of existing career theories and in relation to gender.

5.1 Career plateauing in the context of existing career theories

When considering career development and plateauing it may be useful to adopt the metaphor of a journey. This is not a novel concept; Baruch (2006) commented that “*one can see career as a life journey... people can take the beaten path or navigate their own way in the open plains*” (Baruch, 2006, p.126).

Traditional organizational careers are those which represent *structure* and the beaten path; boundaryless and protean careers represent *action* and the open plains. Career plateauing occurs in the former case when no further opportunities for promotion are available within the organizational structure; in the latter, when individuals no longer take action to create further development for themselves.

Traditional models of career development such as Super’s career stage (Super, 1957) and Levinson’s life stage (Levinson et al., 1978) theories have seen career plateauing as almost a natural part of career development, occurring at either the maturity (Levinson) or maintenance (Super) stages within their models. These models have been heavily criticised in the literature for factors such as their inability to account for the changing economic environment (Reitman and Schneer, 2003) and their lack of

relevance to women's careers (Powell and Mainiero, 1992) but one of the most significant failings for the purposes of this study is their blurring of the distinctions between psychological development, age, and tenure.

For example, although Super's theory assumes that career development passes through distinct psychological phases, studies have shown that not only is age frequently substituted for psychological adjustment but few differences occur between individuals once past the learner stage (Ornstein and Isabella, 1990; Isaksson et al., 2006). Other studies have shown that within these models the effects of age and tenure lead to very different outcomes. (Bedeian et al., 1992).

Levinson's theory suggested different attitudes would accompany each of his three post-midlife stages (growth, continuity, and decline) such that plateauing would reflect naturally occurring attitudinal changes towards work with increasing age. However, Greller and Simpson (1999, p.3) maintained "*None of the research to date supports such explicit differences between age groups*" They suggest that any shifts were more likely to reflect individual changes in identity.

A number of other limitations seem apparent in respect of the usefulness of these models for understanding career plateauing in contemporary contexts. First, they fail to take into account the specificity of circumstance represented both by different types of workplace (nature and size of business, etc), varying individual circumstances (nature of role, tenure), and psychological variables (individual motivation, personality, meaning of work).

New *boundaryless* (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) and *protean* (Hall, 1976) career theories have emerged in order to account for changes in career context. Few studies have examined the subjective variables affecting individual career development (Sullivan et al., 1998) the majority focusing largely on the physical form of new models and shift of career ownership to the individual (Adamson et al., 1998; Baruch, 2006; Mirvis and Hall, 1994).

These new models portray an "all change" situation of entirely self-directed careers in the context of which the very existence of career plateauing may be irrelevant

(Ettington, 1998). But an anomaly exists: there are still large numbers of plateaued older managers in the workplace. In part this may be because the old order has far from broken down (Baruch, 2006) although another explanation that the new models have so far failed to acknowledge may be that ageism generally presents a barrier to movement across boundaries for older managers, thereby creating plateauing by enforced career stasis.

As most older managers will have commenced their careers in hierarchical situations the full implications of new models for older managers may be still in the future. As Mirvis and Hall concede, “*Scholars and practitioners are developing a picture of the boundaryless organization but currently we only have the barest outline of what it will look like*” (Mirvis and Hall, 1994, p.366).

Mirvis and Hall argue that career progression under the new models may be synonymous with achieving individual psychological success with lack of external recognition being associated with psychological failure. Although they do not make it explicit “psychological failure” in this situation could be equated to career plateauing.

An interesting point raised by both Powell and Mainiero (1992) and Roberts (1998) is the extent to which women’s career patterns, which they liken in form to boundaryless and protean models, will in the future also be those of male careers. In discussing their “river of time” model for the exploration of women’s careers, Powell and Mainiero (1992) make a suggestion which seems highly pertinent to career plateauing for all in the contemporary work environment:

Questions such as whether women and men are similarly influenced by non-work considerations in making career decisions and achieving career success, whether women and men place similar importance on objective versus subjective measures of career success and how various personal, organizational and societal factors differentially affect women and men warrant research action (Powell and Mainiero, 1992, p.231).

Having considered the theoretical context of career plateauing in older managers we now turn to an examination of individual psychological determinants revealed by the literature as potentially significant.

5.2 The psychological determinants of career plateauing

Although studies to date have intimated that individuals share the same concerns about the objective success they attain, in fact people judge their careers and their position according to a wide range of individually significant variables e.g. influence, job satisfaction, peer recognition (Heslin, 2005). Heslin maintains that they may even conceptualise and evaluate career success in *realms* such as work-life balance, contribution, fulfilment.

Within the literature, several authors make the point that it is not enough simply to investigate objective factors, an individual's own perceptions and interpretations about their career and their experiences is equally, if not more important (Chao, 1990). And the two interrelate, for example, it generally has been held that plateaued employees have no motivation for development, yet studies show that growth and learning - the development and utilization of new skills, abilities and attitudes - can be maintained in plateaued individuals given sufficient employer support and internal motivation (Maurer et al., 2003).

In an attempt to impose some order on the extreme complexity involved in considering the psychological determinants of career plateauing this review will address groups of variables as demonstrated in figure 4 below. These are arranged according to the extent to which they are fundamental to the individual concerned, i.e. the starting point is individual identity in terms of personality and values, followed by motivation, then attitudes, the latter two being more flexible.

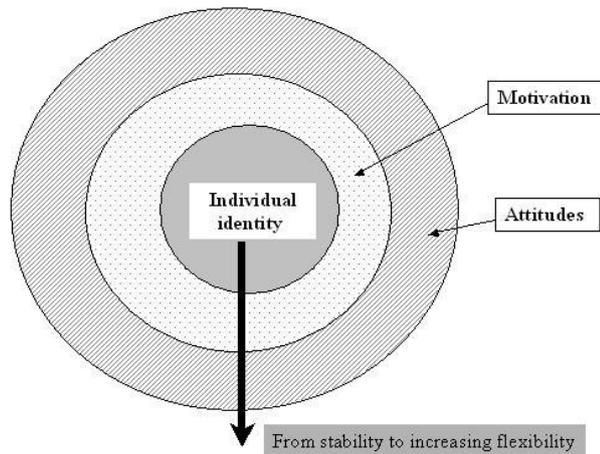


Figure 4 The psychological determinants of career plateauing

5.2.1 Individual identity

5.2.1.1 Personality, intelligence & values

Personality, intelligence and values are generally held to be relatively stable over time. In a longitudinal study over a span of 50 years Judge (1999) demonstrated that certain personality traits and general mental ability are capable of predicting multiple facets of career success in later life whether subjectively or objectively measured. This may partly explain why some older managers continue to climb the career ladder achieving ever greater status and position whereas many cease to progress (Nicholson, 1993).

Warr and Fay (2001) investigate the importance of the proactive personality characterised by personal initiative, arguing that such tendencies lead individuals to seek out their own opportunities, either within their existing organization or elsewhere, thereby avoiding plateauing. However this raises the question of whether individuals who have always had a predilection for self-direction and pro-activity may by definition always have had protean careers. If so, they may have avoided some of the more common determinants of plateauing associated with traditional career models.

Schein's (1985) *career anchors*, fundamental work orientations based on individual abilities, needs, motives and values are also thought to play a role. Although these are held to be fairly stable across a person's lifetime, they may change; in later life there may be either some shift or internal conflict in older managers between the drive for "managerial competence" and those for security and autonomy (Feldman and Weitz, 1988).

Personality variables may shape development orientation. For example "work centrality", the overall importance of work in a person's life, represents a fairly stable set of beliefs with those with high work centrality being more likely to engage in job-specific training (Armstrong-Stassen and Schlosser, 2008) thereby reducing the likelihood of plateauing under some circumstances.

Like personality, *values* are fairly consistent although they can change over time (Sullivan, 1999). Although various studies have been undertaken on the interrelationship of values such as freedom, balance, and security (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001), the significance of work ethic (Pogson et al., 2003), and the impact of competitive orientation (Hansson et al., 1997), with later life career development, results have been marginal and inconclusive. As with many variables these appear to exert an influence only at an individual level.

5.2.1.2 Self-image

How individuals perceive themselves, how they perceive themselves in relation to others and how they perceive themselves relative to their past and future selves particularly in terms of career progress may all be significant factors in older managers' career plateauing (London and Greller, 1991).

Although ageing is an individual process and older people do not consistently, if at all, relate to a group that is defined primarily by age (Bytheway, 1995; Sherman, 1994), the extent to which older individuals consciously or unconsciously adopt an ageing identity may shape their choices, attitudes and behaviour in later careers (Bultena and Powers, 1978).

Although people may vary in the extent to which they consider themselves old, they are aware of the nature of common ageist stereotypes regardless of whether or not they agree with them and will use them as a reference point (Loretto and White, 2006). A study by Desmette and Gaillard (2008) found self-categorization as an "older worker" to be related to negative attitudes towards work in terms of a stronger desire to retire early, and stronger inclination towards intergenerational competition.

Some older managers may start to assume the identity of a pre-retiree although exactly whether and how this relates to career plateauing is largely unknown although Karp comments, "*Many persons probably develop an 'exiting consciousness' several years prior to actual retirement*" (Karp and Yoels, 1981,p.162).

A number of studies have considered the importance of age norms and the notion that an individual's relationship with their aging identity may be affected by a common shared view of the 'right age' at which one should do certain things. It appears that from a *group perspective* age norms exert little influence (Greller and Simpson, 1999) but from an *individual psychological perspective* they may matter a great deal in terms of goal selection and achievement (Freund, 1997).

The significance of age norms in later life is that they reflect age related expectations and the likelihood of goal attainment and thus not only directly affect motivation and limit what individuals see as realistic options, but also may lead to the development of coping processes in order to deal with goals which may now seem unattainable. (Freund, 1997).

It seems that from an individual, psychological perspective age stereotypes or age-related expectations provide a standard people can use to learn whether their behaviour or attitudes are age-appropriate and also whether their achievements are above or below those of their peers (Giles and Reid, 2005). However the extent to which this leads to plateauing or the avoidance of plateauing in older managers has not been investigated.

A final point regarding identity and image is the absence in the literature of any reference to role models for older managers and the effect they may have on career development or plateauing.

5.2.1.3 Gender and race

Gender is a key aspect of identity which has been shown to have potentially significant effects for understanding career plateauing in older managers. In order to avoid repetition these are dealt with in section 5.3 below.

Race also has been shown to impact career plateauing, reducing prospects and opportunities which may lead to diminished ability, motivation or both and ultimately resulting in self-limiting behaviours. A study by (Greenhaus et al., 1990) confirmed that in comparison with white managers their black colleagues received lower ratings on performance and promotability and were more likely to be plateaued.

However as individuals will have encountered this situation throughout their career, it does not help our understanding of what changes may occur in later life; thus far no research has been identified which helps clarify this.

5.2.2 Motivation

This section examines how particular aspects of motivation may affect career plateauing in older managers. We also look at three drivers which may operate to maintain individual motivation regardless of objective career plateauing: *career success*, *job satisfaction* and *personal development*.

To date, relatively little attention has been given to understanding the effects of ageing on work motivation although a review by Kanfer (2004) led to the conclusion that there is neither theoretical justification nor empirical evidence to support the notion of an inevitable and universal decline in work motivation with age. Although theorists such as Erickson (1959, 1980, cited Arnold 1997) see motivation in later life as a closing down process largely concerned with counteracting loss, many studies show that positive motivation still continues (Kooij et al., 2008).

Work motivation is not stable, career aims and aspirations change over time (Baruch, 2006). Although motivation comprises *traits*, an individual's basic ongoing motivational orientations such as need for growth, autonomy, or control, it is also affected by temporal *states* which may vary as a result of changing contextual factors such as evaluation, expectation, reward, and nature of work (Amabile, 1993).

Little seemed to be known about the ways in which individuals' motivation might change over time until Sturges' (1999) research which revealed that for many the importance of material criteria for career success reduces with age to be replaced by an emphasis on internal factors such as influence and autonomy.

London (1990) maintained that changes in later life can result in either reduced or enhanced career growth. He defined career motivation as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of three domains of individual characteristics: **career resilience** – the extent to which people resist career barriers, obstacles or disruptions to their work; **career insight** - how realistic people are about themselves and their careers and how accurately they relate these perceptions to career goals; and **career identity** – the extent to which people define themselves by their work (London, 1990).

Plateaued employees often are thought of as disaffected and lacking in motivation for further progression (Loretto and White, 2006) but evidence has shown that they are in general neither less motivated nor less satisfied than their non-plateaued peers (Near, 1984). London (1990) found that support for career motivation from employers and family is critical in later life and that in its absence *self-directed plateauing* may occur based partly on the internalisation of ageist stereotypes.

What London termed “frame-breaking changes”, radical internal or external events such as redeployment or severe illness, can lead people to question their goals and abilities. How well they adjust depends on their self-confidence, desire for achievement and general resilience. However he also surmises that under these circumstances individuals are most receptive to new insights about themselves, which may lead to further progression and increased resilience.

This seems a significant point which has generally been overlooked in the literature. Whereas London surmises that lack of change inhibits lack of insight which over time may lead to career plateauing, it may also be difficult for older managers who are already objectively plateaued to remain motivated and avoid becoming stale and obsolete without meaningful stimulation for change and renewed insight. This links to the supposition that tenure more than age may be more significant in affecting the extent to which older managers may also become subjectively plateaued (Tremblay and Roger, 1993).

In later life factors such as health, outside interests, and family and other responsibilities may have a greater and more diverse effect on individual workplace motivation than in earlier years (Sterns and Miklos, 1995). They surmise that older adults may have a different perspective on work from younger individuals with survival needs likely to be less urgent and an overall greater knowledge about the likelihood of effort paying off, concluding that:

“goals may not change with age but expectations of achieving these outcomes (promotions, salary increases and other rewards) can diminish... job satisfaction is more closely related to intrinsic factors or internal rewards of work” (Sterns and Miklos, 1995, p.256).

As outlined in Chapter 2, traditional motivational theories such as Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg’s (1966 cited by Amabile 1993) hygiene factors have tended to focus on *intrinsic* (e.g. achievement, meaning, autonomy) and *extrinsic* (e.g. pay, benefits, and status) motivators as independent variables in driving behaviour.

This raises two important points in relation to career progression and plateauing: first, motivators may operate primarily as de-motivators if they are not present, for example plateaued individuals may be de-motivated by the absence of promotion in later life, although this is not necessarily the case (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001). Second, although Maslow and Herzberg maintained that intrinsic and extrinsic motivators operated exclusively and hierarchically i.e. extrinsic motivators need to be taken care of before intrinsic motivators can operate, subsequent studies have shown that individuals can be motivated by *both* e.g. by money and personal challenge (Amabile,

1993). This means that plateaued employees can still be driven by intrinsic motivators even though extrinsic motivators have been removed and they are objectively plateaued.

Motivation can both be *towards* rewards and accomplishment, such as increased status or *away from* negative experiences such as stress. Older managers may reach a plateau because they lack the aspiration, motivation, or ability to continue to progress or they may develop revised aspirations and decide they have done quite well and not want to go further (Near, 1980).

Stress and burnout generally have been regarded as negative motivators for older individuals (Appelbaum and Finestone, 1994). However often these will have been experienced earlier in the career; by this age, older individuals may have developed resilience and coping mechanisms or withdrawn from a highly stressful arena (Baruch, 2006). Nevertheless for some, avoidance of stress may be more of a motivator than the negative effect of stress itself (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001).

5.2.2.1 Motivators

When looking at the motivators (factors that lead an individual to undertake or persist in an activity) (Amabile, 1993) that might lead to *subjective* progress in older managers who are *objectively* plateaued, the literature reveals that there appear to be three main paradigms; motivation for continuing career success, continued individual development, and job satisfaction. We consider each of these in turn below:

5.2.2.1.1 Career success

Career success has been defined as “the real or perceived achievements individuals have accumulated as a result of their work experiences” (Judge et al., 1999) and as acknowledged earlier a balance is needed between conceptualising career success as either an *external* process of climbing up the career ladder (with the associated power and remuneration) or an *internal* feeling of worthiness and achievement As with

motivation itself the significance of extrinsic and intrinsic success may shift, and notions of what constitutes career success may change over time (Baruch, 2006).

This point provided the basis of a study by Sturges into the meaning of career success and how this changes with age. She considered criteria for success in the context of three dimensions: *internal* (accomplishment, personal achievement, enjoyment/job satisfaction, integrity, balance) *external*, (reward, status) and *intangible* (personal recognition, influence) finding that, for a number of reasons, describing success purely in external terms does not actually match what many managers feel about their own achievements (Sturges, 1999), a conclusion shared by Judge et al. (1999).

Sturges found that with increasing age material criteria for success generally reduce in importance and are often replaced by an emphasis on influence and autonomy but she does not consider how this may cause or result from plateauing, particularly in managers over 50, who were not part of her study. She also identified those with a concern with leaving a mark in some way by creating something which was theirs. This thought may go some way to explaining the motivation of older managers who are strongly motivated towards achieving ongoing career success, although this cannot be entirely removed from context.

Individuals have a variety of career goals, career anchors and perspectives of what they mean by career success (Baruch, 2006). Following Schein (1985), Carlson (2001) maintains that the internal career anchor gradually becomes the individual's definition of career success, suggesting that there may be greater consistency in orientation towards particular types of success over time.

As flattening organizational structures mean that success by advancement is less available to individuals than it was in the past it may be that *all* employees are increasingly investigating what success means from their own perspective, focusing on more attainable and potentially more valid models. (Sturges, 1999). For example, accomplishment, expertise and personal achievement may be the best means of measuring career success for managers who believe their career to be boundaryless (Heslin, 2005).

Attempting to predict future continuing career success in later life is a complex operation (Daniel and Heywood, 2007). In later life older managers may differ in their feelings about what they have accomplished: “*If I believe I have achieved success, or as much success as I require, I may stop seeking more. - If I haven’t achieved enough, then I will keep striving*” (Heslin, 2005, p.116).

5.2.2.1.2 *Personal development*

Studies show that whereas *career development* and learning can be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated, *personal development*, by definition, involves development of the individual in ways that are meaningful to them and pertinent to what they perceive is valuable and relevant.

Development is often judged objectively in terms of work context and may be focused on those things that the employer values, such as the acquisition of new, measurable skills. While it has traditionally been held that older managers must keep developing in order to remain promotable this may not act as a motivator for individuals if they perceive themselves as already plateaued or destined soon to become so.

Similarly, while under the traditional organizational career models older managers who are not undertaking training and improving their skills would expect to face reduced promotional opportunities, older managers may still become plateaued regardless of this. Older managers are also aware that barriers to changing jobs over age 50 may counter any development advantages (Daniel and Heywood, 2007).

Reviewing personal development leads naturally to the question, “Development of *what?*” As Sturges (1999) showed, for older managers interest and value in development may relate to developing influence or authority or to developing a legacy to pass on, or simply to the social rewards which are felt to be obtained from participation in development activities. It may also relate to developing others through formal or informal mentoring (Maurer et al., 2003).

Self-efficacy for development, defined as an individual’s confidence in learning totally new things or developing new skills may be an important factor in later life

(Maurer, 2001). Maurer argued that self-efficacy may play a role in learning and development behaviour *independent of perceived benefits of participation*, which goes some way to explaining the drive for individual development in plateaued employees. He concluded that voluntary participation in development activities by ageing employees is an increasingly crucial behaviour to understand, although it may be questioned how much this is actually understood in *younger* individuals in the workplace if the link to direct reward is removed.

Overall, Maurer found that age *per se* negatively affects individual and situational variables that predispose a person for development although many other variables may seemingly counteract this:

a person who is oriented toward employee development will be someone who has participated in development activities before, perceiving themselves as possessing qualities needed for learning, having social support for development at work and outside of work, being job involved, having insight into his or her career, and believing in the need for development, in his or her ability to develop skills and to receive intrinsic benefits from participating (Maurer, 2001, p718).

This seems to underline that, as with many other psychological determinants, a propensity for personal development in later life will depend much on an individual's earlier career and personal experiences or existing attributes; they do not operate within a vacuum on older managers as clean slates.

In conclusion, this section has shown that individuals may not see themselves as career plateaued if they perceive that they are continuing to develop personally. If there is sufficient challenge in their day-to-day activities from which they can learn, benefit and receive satisfaction and they have sufficient motivation for development then they may have no interest in further hierarchical promotion even if the opportunity is available.

5.2.21.3 *Job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction is a variable which the literature reveals lies at the heart of many different perspectives on career development. Some studies suggest that it may be a key motivator for older individuals who may invest considerable effort in its pursuit in the absence of more tangible prizes such as further pay and promotion (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004; Sterns and Miklos, 1995). Others see job satisfaction and career success as being inextricably intertwined (Janson and Martin, 1982). Others however view *career satisfaction* as a long term state reflecting fulfilment and contentment with the career overall, with *job satisfaction* being a much more temporal situation concerned only with satisfaction with the current role (Maurer et al., 2003).

This latter point is important in terms of how job satisfaction might relate to career plateauing in that older plateaued managers may be satisfied with their overall career achievements even though they may perceive that their current role lacks further opportunities (Ettington, 1998). This may lead to disaffection, but it appears more likely that *career* satisfaction may ameliorate *job* satisfaction (Feldman and Weitz, 1988).

It may also help to explain why numerous studies have shown that even long-term plateaued managers seem happy with their situation and tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction than their younger colleagues (Near, 1980; Janson and Martin, 1982). They may in part be changing their attitudes and perceptions in relation to the reality of their situation in order to maintain feelings of worth and to protect the position and status they have already achieved (Warr and Fay, 2001).

The link between age and job satisfaction is not straightforward however. Questioning whether and how age and tenure might be linked to job satisfaction. (Bedeian et al., 1992) found that in fact age-job satisfaction relationships were weak whereas tenure-job satisfaction models were stronger. This study makes an important contribution highlighting the distinction between the two concepts which many other papers overlook.

Many of the studies into job satisfaction highlight some of shortcomings of quantitative approaches which attempt to prove relationships between variables or predict certain statistical outcomes and why such studies can produce seemingly contradictory findings e.g. that plateaued managers appear to be highly satisfied with their position. They fail to adequately address what may lie at the heart of the issue: the *meaning* for individuals themselves of particular constructs.

Such approaches fail to acknowledge that job satisfaction may reflect the individual's own assessment of their position *as they want it to be* rather than how it is perceived by others. This may mean that plateaued older managers report being very satisfied with their job because it represents a state that currently matches their own subjective needs and aspirations – perhaps for *lack* of further progress and challenge. It may also represent a shift in aspirations to reflect current reality (as mentioned above) or simply an unwillingness to lose face by admitting lack of satisfaction with an unchangeable situation.

From the literature it appears that “job satisfaction” comprises a range of different attributes which vary according to what is important to each individual in a certain context at a particular point in time. As such it may contribute towards plateauing and may also affect how older managers react once plateaued. Like many of the variables in this study it is closely related to many others, for example as Maurer (2001) found, job satisfaction is also linked to development probably, he surmised, because people who enjoy what they do are apt to spend more time learning about it and associating with people who are also involved.

Perhaps the key point is that studies into job satisfaction in plateaued managers reveal that contrary to objective assessments of plateauing as a negative experience, from the older manager's subjective viewpoint it may not be so at all.

In this section we have considered job satisfaction as a *motivator* although in the literature many researchers have seen it as either an independent or dependent *attitudinal* variable. In the next section we consider briefly some of the other attitudes which may influence career plateauing in older managers.

5.2.3 Attitudes

The significance of older managers' attitudes in respect of career plateauing are twofold: first that negative stereotypes (and possibly the extent to which older managers believe them to be true) may limit the opportunities available to older managers (London, 1990). Second, as attitudes are precursors to behaviour it may be assumed that older managers' attitudes will strongly influence the actions they take in terms of seeking further career advancement (Greller and Richtermeyer, 2006).

Unlike comparatively constant factors such as personality and values, attitudes tend to be unstable and are likely to vary significantly according to job role and status, nature of work, previous experience and motivation towards future goals (Ornstein and Isabella, 1990). Although many attitudes may contribute towards career plateauing in older managers, two in particular: flexibility and initiative have been found to be particularly relevant:

Ageist stereotypes often portray older employees as being inflexible and having negative attitudes towards change (Loretto et al, 2006). However it is unlikely that age *per se* is the reason for this. The root cause of perceived resistance to change is more likely to be tenure (Bedeian et al., 1992), a greater concern for security as retirement approaches (Karp, 1987) or a drive to try and hold on to what has already been achieved through maintenance of the status quo (Warr and Fay, 2001).

Various studies, particularly those into attitudes towards workplace learning and development in later life have demonstrated that given the right opportunities and support, many "attitudinally plateaued" managers will show enthusiasm for ongoing development and change. Even those who have refused to participate in workplace provided training may still be prepared to pursue other types of work-related development which they perceive as personally relevant (Robson and Hansson, 2007).

In section 5.2.2 above we considered the importance of proactivity which is held to be *motivational* (van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008), but the *attitudinal* concept of initiative in terms of creating opportunities and overcoming barriers may be equally

important in plateauing in later life careers. Consistent with other research a study by Warr (2001) found that older employees exhibited less education initiative than younger ones, but concluded that in respect of general job-related initiative, “*older employees are in general no less self-starting than younger ones*” (Warr and Fay, 2001, p.352).

The difficulty, as ever, is that the literature is unclear about the extent to which an older manager’s attitudes will affect their likelihood of becoming plateaued, or whether they only assume real significance once they have *become* plateaued. Thus far they have failed to clarify whether the biggest influence of attitudes is on an individual’s responses to organizational demands, or in limiting their own motivation.

Undoubtedly many other attitudes may exist which potentially could be pertinent to this study, but constraints of space and time do not allow for their analysis. A final point worth making however is that attitudes, as motivation, may be generational. For example, work ethic and reliability may be valued only by the current generation (Loretto and White, 2006). Similarly studies which have shown older workers to be both significantly more dependable and less ambitious (Guthrie and Schwoerer, 1996) may also reflect generational factors. The relevance of this point is that although these variables may have a significant impact on career plateauing in older managers they have little to do with age *per se*.

5.3 Differences by gender

In the preceding section, we considered groups of psychological variables which the literature revealed are likely to be significant in relation to career plateauing in older managers. At the heart of these was identity, part of which is gender. As numerous studies demonstrate that on many levels female career experiences do not reflect those of males, it seems important to deal with some of these issues separately, which we now do here.

Traditionally approaches to career development have been based on the male model although the consensus is that the traditional linear career path never really applied to

women (Reitman and Schneer, 2003). In form women's careers are more like boundaryless or protean models with less continuity than men's, frequent job changes and concerns for non-work responsibilities (Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Isaksson et al., 2006); Reitman and Schneer, 2003). As a result, numerous studies into career development, particularly those based upon traditional career models such as those of Super (1957) and Levinson (1978) acknowledge that their findings probably do not reflect the female experience and call for further investigation (Gallos, 1989; Scase and Goffee, 1990).

Although it is recognised that work and career are just as important for women as for men (Still and Timms, 1998) there are undoubtedly gender-related differences. Still (1998) maintains that women tend to have random careers compared to men and found that older women are rarely motivated to pursue career advancement for its own sake, being prepared to forego greater financial rewards and status in order to maintain quality of life and satisfaction in their work. Both of these aspects may lead to plateauing.

Three key variables have been identified which may lead to older female managers' career experiences differing from men's particularly in the way they influence career plateauing and we look at these in turn below.

First, women's careers are *relational* (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005); often both families and careers are equally significant and self-development and social development are critical factors in career success (O'Neil et al., 2008; Tremblay and Roger, 1993). Consequently in later life women may either be motivated to expand their careers in response to lessening external responsibilities (empty nest), or may reduce career involvement due to caring responsibilities (elderly parents, grandchildren) or a retired partner or spouse (Roberts and Friend, 1998).

Studies have shown that the work experience of women managers varies according to a number of distinct personal and organizational circumstances (Scase and Goffee, 1990; Isaksson et al., 2006) but there is lack of agreement about how this may influence career plateauing in later life.

Second, women may have a different perspective on what career means to them (Gallos, 1989). Evidence shows that they are more likely to describe career success in terms of internal criteria such as accomplishment, achievement and personal recognition (Sturges, 1999). According to Tremblay and Roger (1993, p.240.) women's careers are a *“process of personal development which involves interesting and challenging work and balances with the rest of their life”*, while Sturges (1999, p.248) concurs that women are *“likely to describe career success as just one part of the success they wanted to achieve in their lives as a whole”*.

Sturges found that within the subjective variables that define women's careers, changes take place in later life, for example the importance women place on accomplishment and personal recognition seem to decline with age – with success as personal achievement becoming more important. This may reflect the increasing confidence of women based on successful earlier work experiences (Sturges, 1999) or may depend on variables such as identification with an ageing self or exposure to new experiences or challenges (London, 1990).

A key concept connected with women's careers which was not found to be specifically mentioned in male models in this review is that of **self-esteem** which is seen as being inextricably linked with work in some women's lives and a motivator for continuing career development (Still and Timms, 1998). Further research in this area is needed to clarify whether this may be a generational influence and how much, and under what circumstances it, like confidence, increases or wanes.

Third, as the nature of women's careers is in general more in line with boundaryless or protean models, representing more a series of jobs than a predetermined path (Scase and Goffee, 1990), this may mean that women's attitudes vary in respect of the level of achievement or progress they feel they have attained by later life. For example, whereas men may start to experience dissatisfaction as they perceive their influence beginning to decline as they age, women, who have made a slower advance due to career interruptions, may still be expecting to see their influence increase (Still and Timms, 1998; Powell and Mainiero, 1992).

Thus women may view the plateauing of their careers from a more subjective perspective than men and may react less to objective externally created situations such as cessation of promotion and further status; they may see later life careers as “more of the same” in terms of what they have always considered important (Roberts and Friend, 1998). They may also retain greater feelings of control. For instance Cornelius (2005) maintains that the failure of some women to achieve positions at the highest level can represent choice rather than repression.

As with older male managers women’s ideas about career development are likely to be shaped by the constraints they face in the workplace (due to factors such as stereotyping and job-typing) but older women may find themselves doubly constrained in terms of opportunities (Tremblay and Roger, 1993). Although this might be assumed to lead to negative reactions studies have shown that women are generally found to be more satisfied with their careers than men (Armstrong-Stassen and Cameron, 2005) which also may affect or reflect the extent to which they view themselves as subjectively plateaued.

From this brief review it appears that there are significant gender differences in the determinants of career plateauing in older managers and, in fact, these may operate far more pervasively than this summary has been able to indicate. It is important therefore that these are taken into account in the focus and design of future research.

5.4 Summary

The review of the literature relating to the psychological determinants of career plateauing in older managers has revealed that many different variables may play a part. The model presented in Figure 6 below is an attempt to demonstrate the relationship between them.

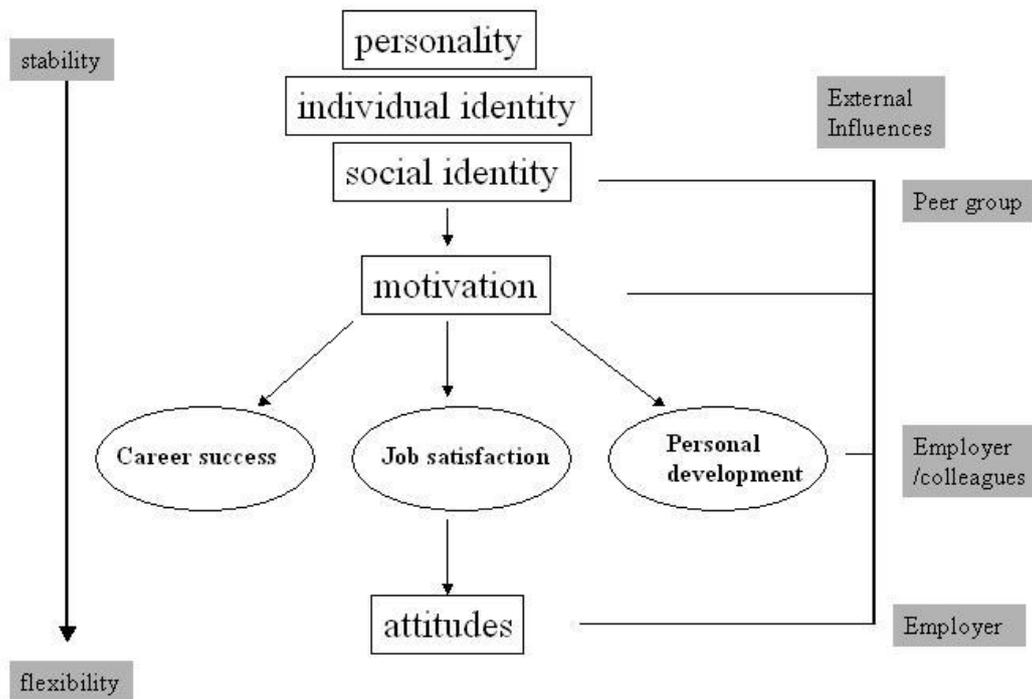


Figure 5 The relationship between the psychological determinants of career plateauing

As the model shows, the extent to which particular variables are either relatively stable (personality, values, identity) within the individual, or subject to change over time and in respect of context (motivation and attitudes), is an important distinction. Whereas stable factors may determine an individual’s underlying propensity towards ongoing achievement and development in later life (whether objectively or subjectively measured) more changeable attributes such as motivation and attitudes can be affected by temporal, external influences and in particular generational effects, leading to different outcomes.

As the literature reveals, the importance of each variable within the model in terms of its effect on career plateauing tends to be idiosyncratic, each individual older manager will represent a different configuration resulting from factors such as their innate disposition, career experiences and current context.

An equally important aspect of the model is the relationship of psychological variables to external context, particularly the way that employers, peers and colleagues may influence and affect the way individuals perceive themselves and their careers in later life.

Finally, although the model can be applied to both male and female careers, the role that gender differences exert on these variables must not be overlooked.

6. Discussion

6.1 Career models

This review of literature has revealed that the barriers between traditional, linear, ‘organizational’ careers and new boundaryless and protean careers are, in practice, breaking down although there is not, so far, an ‘all change’ situation whereby the original concepts are now defunct.

The importance of considering career progression and career plateauing in both objective (physical) and subjective (psychological) terms cannot be overstated. Related to this is the significance of context – both the type, size, sector and structure of an organization and an individual’s overall circumstances and previous career experiences have an effect on later life career plateauing.

Most older manager will have started their careers under traditional career models but may now be facing pressures related to changing career contexts at the same time as age-related changes may be impacting their careers. Additionally, demographic changes mean many may find they now need to work longer, extending the duration of career plateaus while social change is increasing the significance of work-life balance in all careers.

6.2 Plateauing and progression

Existing studies have tended to view the concept of a career plateau as a dichotomy, i.e. one is either plateaued or not (Chao,1990), however it is unclear whether the obverse of career plateauing is career progress or whether mere lack of objective progress today equates to a career plateau.

Furthermore although job tenure, e.g. five years, is a measure of plateauing, it is a gradual process: individuals can report feeling “a little bit plateaued” to “very plateaued” (Chao, 1990). Whereas for those at an earlier age a plateau may come to an end through promotion, for many older managers there may be no expectation of

any end other than retirement, whether early, unplanned, or planned. This being the case, it suggests that employers may not achieve the best from older plateaued managers by treating them the same as younger employees.

Use of the term ‘career plateau’ may not ultimately be appropriate as a way of referring to a specific state which is experienced differently by older individuals partly as a result of factors to which younger employees may not be subject. Although the literature is concerned with analysing the terminology relating to models of career development, a call for an alternative term – or several variations thereof - to better describe the situation of plateaued older employees is notable by its absence.

That state may represent lack of objective career progression but may be qualitatively different to that which is experienced in earlier life. As Adamson highlighted, these problems may to a degree be hampering progress in the field: “*We (academics, practitioners, employees) have not yet developed the vocabulary which would allow us to enter a new era in our understanding of careers*” (Adamson et al., 1998, p.252).

The literature also fails to provide a clear notion of “career progression”. Instead, there seem to be two related but not identical paradigms: progression as continuing *personal development* or progression as continuing *career success*. These accentuate the notions of “more” or “new” but do not in themselves indicate all the psychological variables which may be pertinent. The construct of “job satisfaction” may be an equally strong motivator and continuing job satisfaction could, for some, be the benchmark of success and progress.

It is also possible that for individuals themselves career progress simply represents the ability to keep working on a day-to-day basis, their motivation may be no greater than this.

6.3 The meaning of ‘age’

Many quantitative studies although establishing a link between age and various aspects of career progression and career plateauing actually failed to shed any light on how or why this might be. This underlines that Bedeian’s et al’s (1992, p.45) view

that "Age is at best a shorthand for other variables which are typically identified with experiential events or conditions (e.g. perceptual, cognitive, and linguistic development) acting over time".

In fact as Warr et al. (2001, p.345) in their study of age and personal initiative at work accurately surmise, "*Of course age itself can have no causal impact. We need also to examine variables possibly linked to age and the outcome variables of interest to learn whether they may be responsible for any age-association that is observed*".

A further point which many studies failed to address is the relevance *to individuals themselves* of the concept of 'older'. The age range of 50 and over is not only a heterogeneous group made up of people who have no more in common with each other than they did at an earlier age, but with age, individual differences start to increase (Sterns and Miklos, 1995). This is a particularly significant point in terms of the determinants of career plateauing for at the very time when greater individual differences are emerging in older individuals, they are confronting age stereotyping, a process which operates to strip them of their individuality and reduce it to a number of largely inaccurate perceived attitudes and behaviours (Greller and Simpson, 1999).

Related to this is the absence in the literature of general acknowledgement of changes across the age range even though an individual in their early fifties may have different aspirations, perceptions and drivers from someone in their mid-sixties, caused perhaps by proximity to retirement or increasing health concerns (Bytheway, 1995).

In fact, what the literature has tended to show is that it is less age than the passage of time which has an effect. Roberts refers to the construct of "career momentum" to reflect a person's perception of movement or mobility in their career (Roberts and Friend, 1998). In itself this incorporates an element of comparatively looking backwards to assess rate of progress and to evaluate the current situation; people use it as a predictor of future success.

One reason why this may not have been greatly stressed is that it largely requires both qualitative and longitudinal study. As Roberts' (1998) paper shows, when this is achieved, it can produce powerful results in terms of explanation and prediction.

The variations in values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour which are attributable to a particular generation or cohort are also difficult to identify without longitudinal and qualitative studies. Such research may help clarify outcomes which are commonly attributed to chronological age.

6.4 External influences

Although they have not been examined in this literature review beyond the Scoping Study, external influences cannot be ignored in a study of psychological variables. The influence of ageism, employment opportunities, social norms, family and other outside influences, and peer and employer pressure are just some of the variables that may be important within individual employment contexts characterised by nature and type of role, employing organization, tenure and peer group.

6.5 Theoretical limitations

This paper undoubtedly will have many limitations some of which will, to a degree, remain unknown until it has been assessed. However a major restriction is in respect of potentially pertinent theories which have not been included.

Throughout this review various papers have introduced particular psychological theories in relation to their argument, whether or not their authors support them or challenge their relevance. Theories have been in the areas of personality, personal and social identity and image, and motivation – not simply motivational theories themselves, but those which may account for changes in motivation.

Each is potentially valid but as few were mentioned in more than one paper, it was decided due to the space constraints of this paper to leave them out. They will be revisited in future research.

6.6 Personal reflection, limitations and learning

Applying the theoretical systematic review process to a very specific live area of interest has shown it to be a highly effective method.

Having completed the review it is difficult to know what, with hindsight, I would have done differently. As this has been, in its entirety, a learning process it has at times felt laboured and awkward, requiring a degree of faith that it would all “come together” in the end, producing clear, relevant and useful findings. As with all learning, this stage necessarily must be gone through in order to gain even the most rudimentary expertise. What I would hope to do differently in future is to undertake such reviews more speedily, succinctly and seamlessly, with more confidence in the outcome.

A further frustration has been in the area of attempting to achieve a balance between narrative and critical analysis in producing a review of two large and divergent bodies of literature which incorporate many different philosophical approaches and methodologies. No doubt this could have been better achieved.

6.7 Summary

This review has revealed the majority of studies into the psychological determinants of career plateauing to be either quantitative, cross-sectional rather than longitudinal and failing to provide sufficiently rich detail about such subjective factors such as motivation, attitudes and identity, or conceptual, theorising about models of career development.

Empirical studies have largely focused on measuring and quantifying the characteristics or consequences of career decisions rather than attempting to understand their meaning for individuals. Consequently, they provide insufficient insight into what determines career plateauing in contemporary workplace settings.

There is evidence that changes may take place in individuals which affect their career priorities in later life but again these generally represent a range of complex and interrelated factors which may be more a result of cumulative experience than age *per se*. Studies show that age in itself is not a useful construct to relate to the psychological determinants of career plateauing in older managers; if it is to be used at all it needs anchoring in more specific concepts such as functional or relative age. Many age-related psychological variables such as individual personality, self-efficacy, and motivational priorities have been found to be linked to tenure, social norms and many other constructs.

Searches for this review revealed that evidence relating to career plateauing in older managers is located within a wide and diverse range of literatures: HR, psychology, sociology, gerontology, careers, economics, politics, feminism, learning and development, and more. Different methodologies are also adopted. The results as Bedeian et al., (1992, p.33) note in their study of age, tenure and job satisfaction “*when one adopts different lenses to view the same phenomenon one does 'see' different things*”.

This can be both a positive and negative outcome. In terms of future research it will be important to adopt a consistent epistemological stance and a rigorous methodology in order to produce robust, meaningful results.

7. Conclusion

A literature review by its very nature incorporates material already covered by other researchers. Its value lies in synthesis of this material in relation to a particular issue thereby identifying knowledge gaps, a number of which have emerged following this review.

(Bailyn, 1989) identified a need for the development of orientational categories for understanding individual experiences at work based on “individual actors’ wants, plans and commitments”, and this would undoubtedly be useful in terms of older managers and their differing conceptions of career plateauing.

Part of such an exercise may involve using the typology of meanings of career success developed by Sturges (1999) in order to ascertain first, how this applies to managers aged 50 and over, and second, how if at all individual conceptions of *career success* relate to those of *career plateauing*.

A gap in knowledge exists in respect of the ways in which, and under what circumstances, older managers may work to create their own *niche* of specialization and influence as an aspirational end point in later careers. This may relate to or overlap with an investigation into conceptions of development in the careers of those who have always had a protean or boundaryless career structure, particularly those such as professionals, who may be regarded as objectively ‘plateaued’ from an early age.

Further investigation is also required into the extent to which individuals’ behaviour and attitudes in the workplace are influenced by their own conceptions of age, age stereotypes and their own ageist attitudes. This is particularly significant in terms of the “baby boomer” generation who for social, economic and demographic reasons may exhibit different attitudes than earlier generations.

Finally, little is known about the subjective influence of older individuals' financial situation, including pension provision, on their motivation to work, in particular the variables that drive those in later life who can afford to retire but choose to continue to work. A summary of these knowledge gaps is provided in Table 16 below:

Table 18 Future research

Focus of study	Purpose of study
The meaning to individuals of 'career progression' and 'career plateauing'.	Establishing a typology of different types of subjective career progress.
The interrelationship of conceptions of career success and career progression in older managers.	Building on Sturges' (1999) typology of the meaning of success and 1) how this differs by age and 2) affects aspirations/goals for the future.
'Niche' development as an end-point of career success in older managers.	Investigating how, when and in what ways older managers create their own niche of specialization and comfort as locus of control in later careers.
Later life careers in protean older managers.	Examining the conceptions of success and progression in those who have always had a protean or boundaryless career structure. (Particularly those e.g. professionals, who may be regarded as 'plateaued' from an early age).
Investigating "them" not "me" attitudes in older managers, i.e. the influence of self-referent age identity and ageism on future career progression.	Examining the extent to which individuals' behaviour and attitudes are influenced by their own conceptions of age, age stereotypes and own ageist attitudes.
The subjective influence of financial situation, including pension provision, on older managers' future career aspirations.	Investigating the influence of motivational variables in those who can afford to retire but choose to continue to work.

All the above studies would need to reflect the experiences of both male and female individuals.

7.1 Research questions

When assessing the potential of the above research options it appears that the greatest value and relevance may lie in the first two options which would appear to relate to the majority of older managers and have the greatest relevance to current workplace developments, particularly changes in career structures and context. As this review has demonstrated, career development (in terms of progression or plateauing) and career success are interrelated and it would be interesting and useful to build on the work already undertaken by Sturges (1999) to extend this further to managers over 50 and to establish how the two conceptions differ, if at all, in their meaning for individuals.

Part of this would be an exploration of whether career plateauing is seen as the absence of career progression and/or career success or whether it is felt to be an entirely different construct.

The gap identified in existing knowledge suggests that the questions should address the following issues:

1. What is the meaning of career progression for older managers?
2. How does this relate to conceptions of ongoing career success?
3. Do these conceptions differ according to
 - a) age, as a relative construct
 - b) gender?

As mentioned above, the intention will be to devise a model of the typology of meanings of career progression and plateauing which may then be tested at a future time (by this researcher or another) through large scale quantitative research.

Longitudinal studies would also be useful although these are not considered further at this stage as they are not an option for PhD research.

In conducting this research I will not be seeking to uncover general ‘laws’ but rather qualitatively different patterns of understanding, attitudes and behaviour recounted by individual older managers using grounded theory to produce a new typology. Such research could be both academically meaningful and practically useful.

Although it was dealt with only in the Scoping Study and did not form part of the main literature review, the significance of *context* in such studies cannot be overlooked. HR policies and practices, particularly those relating to training and development and performance management are significant elements in ongoing career progression in older employees. Any research which is undertaken would have to take these into account along with such variables as size and nature of organization, specific managerial role, tenure and even geographic location.

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