

Air Force Institute of Technology

**AFIT Scholar**

---

Theses and Dissertations

Student Graduate Works

---

6-2005

## Effects of Career Plateauing on Turnover: A Test of a Model

Christine Y. Rilovick

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.afit.edu/etd>



Part of the [Human Resources Management Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rilovick, Christine Y., "Effects of Career Plateauing on Turnover: A Test of a Model" (2005). *Theses and Dissertations*. 3788.

<https://scholar.afit.edu/etd/3788>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Graduate Works at AFIT Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of AFIT Scholar. For more information, please contact [AFIT.ENWL.Repository@us.af.mil](mailto:AFIT.ENWL.Repository@us.af.mil).



**EFFECTS OF CAREER PLATEAUIING ON TURNOVER: A TEST OF A  
MODEL**

THESIS

Christine Y. Rilovick, Major, USAF

AFIT/GEM/ENV/05J-01

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
AIR UNIVERSITY**

**AIR FORCE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio**

APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED

The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

AFIT/GEM/ENV/05J-01

EFFECTS OF CAREER PLATEAUIING ON TURNOVER: A TEST OF A MODEL

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty

Department of Systems and Engineering Management

Graduate School of Engineering and Management

Air Force Institute of Technology

Air University

Air Education and Training Command

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Science in Engineering Management

Christine Y. Rilovick, BS

Major, USAF

June 2005

APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED.

EFFECTS OF CAREER PLATEAUIING ON TURNOVER: A TEST OF A MODEL

Christine Y. Rilovick, BS  
Major, USAF

Approved:

/signed/  
Sharon G. Heilmann, Maj (USAF) (Chairman)

12 July 2005  
date

/signed/  
John E. Bell, Maj (USAF) (Member)

12 July 2005  
date

/signed/  
Daniel T. Holt, Maj (USAF) (Member)

19 July 2005  
date

### **Abstract**

The structure of most organizations dictates that only 1% of the employees will retire before they reach a career plateau. It is estimated that the number of people perceiving they are career plateaued will only increase in the future since more unusually well-qualified candidates will be competing for a diminishing number of positions. By the year 2015, people will perceive themselves to be career plateaued faster than they have for the past 30 years. Despite the natural occurrence of career plateauing and the large number of people who are plateaued, career plateauing still creates frustration among employees.

Given that an estimated 80% of the work conducted in organizations is performed by employees who are career plateaued, it would be beneficial to better understand if these plateaued individuals are likely to remain with the organization despite being plateaued. Therefore adding career plateauing to an existing turnover model could be beneficial in furthering our understanding of the turnover process.

As such the primary purpose of this research was the introduction of the concept of career plateauing into an existing turnover model to investigate potential effects on turnover. Results from this study showed that perceptions of begin career plateaued did account for variance in turnover and the degree to which one believed himself to be plateaued was positively associated with one's intent to leave an organization.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my advisors Major Sharon Heilmann, Major John Bell, and Major Daniel Holt. Your guidance, insight, and patience were invaluable in allowing me to reach outside of my knowledge base and discover new ways to approach future challenges in my life.

Christine Y. Rilovick

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
List of Tables .....	viii
I. Introduction .....	1
II. Literature Review .....	5
III. Method .....	22
IV. Results .....	31
V. Discussion .....	38
Appendix A. Career Plateauing Survey.....	42
Appendix B. Participant Letter of Instruction.....	55
Appendix C. Correlations Between Dependent and Independent Variables .....	56
References .....	58
Vita .....	62



## **List of Figures**

	Page
1. Major Factors Affecting Perceived Desirability of Movement (March & Simon, 1958) .....	7
2. Mobley's 1977 Model of Intermediate Linkages (Mobley, 1977) .....	9
3. Relationships Between the Determinants, Intervening Variables, and Turnover (Price, 1977) .....	10
4. Revised Causal Model of Turnover (Price & Mueller, 1981) .....	12
5. Unified Model of Turnover (Bluedorn, 1982) .....	13
6. Model of the turnover process used in study (Griffeth et al., 2005) .....	15
7. Turnover Model Incorporating Career Plateau .....	21

## **List of Tables**

	Page
1. Sample Data Demographics .....	24
2. Variables and Items Inventory .....	24

# EFFECTS OF CAREER PLATEAUIING ON TURNOVER: A TEST OF A MODEL

## **I. Introduction**

Organizations are interested in being successful and employ several resources in an effort to attain that success. Arguably, people are the most important resource to any organization, making the most significant contribution to its success. However, when people decide to voluntarily leave an organization, the overall effectiveness of the organization may decrease for several reasons (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). First, the organization loses the knowledge that the departing employee possesses. Second, the organization must expend time, money and resources to recruit and select replacements. Third, the organization must expend time, money and resources to train those replacements. In the ideal situation, the time, money, and resources to recruit and train new employees are well spent when the replacements' performance exceed the performance of those who have gone. However, it is feasible that the replacements are not as effective as those that voluntarily left the organization. Not all turnover should be avoided. Functional turnover, when low performing employees are fired or when older employees retire, is a necessary and beneficial process (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984; Dalton & Todor, 1979). Involuntary turnover, including dismissals, layoffs, deaths and retirements, is also a necessary and beneficial process (Price, 1977). Dysfunctional turnover, when productive employees decide to leave an organization, is the type of turnover that organizations should take steps to avoid (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984; Dalton & Todor, 1979). Voluntary turnover, including quitting and resigning, is also the type of turnover that organizations should take steps to avoid (Price, 1977). This research

effort focused on voluntary turnover since voluntary turnover accounts for the majority of turnover.

In order to reduce the challenges and risks associated with these voluntary departures, it is important for the leaders of organizations to understand why employees choose to leave. Each employee, undoubtedly, has unique reasons for leaving an organization to include pay concerns, social support concerns, job stress, and limited promotion opportunities (Price, 2001). Still, if the general trends that guide these individual choices are better understood, leaders might be able to develop programs to resolve employees' concerns and encourage them to stay.

Many studies have been conducted to determine why employees voluntarily leave organizations and the resulting impacts of these voluntary departures (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; March & Simon, 1958; Price, 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981). Turnover models seem to have several common characteristics. Historically, intent to turnover has proven to be a valuable predictor of actual turnover (Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth, Steel, Allen & Bryan, 2005; Hom, Griffeth, & Sellar, 1984; Price & Mueller, 1981). In turn, job search is believed to precede withdrawal cognitions (Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth, et al., 2005; March & Simon, 1958; Price, 1977; Price & Mueller 1981; Steel, 2002), as many theorists argue that few individuals choose to leave without actively seeking alternative employment (Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth, et al., 2005; March & Simon, 1958; Price, 1977; Price & Mueller 1981; Steel, 2002). Researchers agree that this chain of events is triggered by the affective perceptions one has toward the job (e.g., job satisfaction) and the organization (e.g., organizational commitment) (Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth, et al., 2005; Price & Mueller, 1981).

This basic model of turnover has been studied extensively and several attempts have been made to make sense of these studies, using meta-analytic techniques that accumulate the results across studies (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Most recently, Griffeth et al. (2000) conducted a meta-analysis on hundreds of turnover studies conducted and literature written on turnover to date and determined the best predictors of turnover were job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search, comparison of alternative, withdrawal cognitions, and quit intentions. Quit intentions is believed to be the best predictor of turnover followed by organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Griffeth et al. (2000) suggested, based on the findings from the most recent research studies included in their meta-analysis, that job search was also a viable predictor of turnover (Griffeth, et al., 2005; Griffeth, et al., 2000). Despite the research that has been done on job turnover, only 50% of the variance in employees' intentions to leave an organization has been explained (Griffeth, et al., 2005; Griffeth, et al., 2000). It is important to continue researching in order to identify what other variables account for the remaining 50% of unexplained variance in why employees voluntarily leave their jobs.

The purpose of this study was to further research efforts in discovering causes for the 50% of unexplained variance by determining if career plateau accounts for variance in projecting turnover. Career plateau refers to the point in one's career where future advancement is not likely (Bardwick, 1986; Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977; Veiga, 1981). The traditional pyramid-shaped organizational structure dictates that except for the very few, and possibly for only the one person at the top of the pyramid, everyone's career will reach a point beyond where further promotion in the organization will not

occur (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). Couple this with the idea that companies are now operating with fewer levels of management and fewer employees, the opportunities for employees to move up in the organization and enjoy the rewards of promotion are fewer and less frequent. This decrease in advancement opportunities for employees, even those qualified for advancement, results in reaching the height of one's career far before retirement (Burke, 1989; Choy & Savery, 1998; Near, 1980; Trembly & Alain, 1993). Studies on career plateauing suggest that 34% to 54% of employees perceive themselves to be career plateaued (Allen, Russell, Poteet, & Dobbins, 1999). In essence, career plateauing is no longer believed to be something that only happens to bad employees, instead it is something that will eventually affect most employees. Now and more in the future, perceptions of being career plateaued will affect the majority of employees and therefore, research on career plateauing and its impacts on turnover is warranted and necessary to better understand human behavior in organizations.

## **II. Literature Review**

Previous research conducted on turnover and career plateau are discussed in this chapter. Turnover studies and models will be discussed in chronological order. Models used in previous turnover research are detailed in order to justify the use of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search behavior, and intent to quit in the turnover model used during this study.

### *Turnover*

Turnover has been defined as movement across membership boundaries of a social system (Price, 1977). The study of turnover, or the movement of people across membership boundaries in a social system, started before Price defined the term in 1977. March and Simon (1958) are credited with developing the first formal theory pertaining to turnover. March and Simon (1958) included the now used concepts of job satisfaction, job search behavior, and intent to quit. Their analysis centered on equilibrium of paying employees at a certain level that keeps the employees interested in working and employees providing a certain level of contribution to the organization. If this equilibrium does not exist and employees feel their contributions outweigh the pay they are receiving, then employees will look to leave the organization in an effort to bring the balance between pay and contribution back into balance. A shift in the equilibrium can occur in the opposite direction as well when employees receive greater pay than their contributions; thus, causing them to be satisfied with their jobs and not leave the organization.

March and Simon (1958) introduced the concepts of perceived desirability of movement and perceived ease of movement as two factors that affect the equilibrium

between pay and contributions. Perceived desirability of movement was derived from a combination of satisfaction with current job and the perceived possibility of intra-organizational transfer. A large shift in the equilibrium between pay and contribution to the point where employees are no longer satisfied causes employees to consider the perceived desirability of leaving the organization. The size of the shift in equilibrium needed to push employees to consider the perceived desirability of leaving the organization, is affected by employees' perceptions of how easily it is to move from this organization to another organization. Perceived ease of movement was derived from the number of perceived extra-organizational alternatives. As a result of March and Simon's research, perceived desirability of movement and perceived ease of movement are included in most turnover models created after 1958 (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth et al., 2000; Griffeth et al., 2005; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Price, 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981; Steel & Ovalle, 1984).

March and Simon (1958) also introduced the link between being satisfied with one's job and intentions of leaving the organization. March and Simon listed conformity of job to self image, predictability of job relationships, and compatibility of job and other roles as predictors of job satisfaction. As conformity of job to self image, predictability of job relationships, and compatibility of job and other roles increases an employee's satisfaction with his job increases resulting in a decrease in his perceived desirability of movement. See Figure 1 for the major factors affecting perceived desirability of movement model developed by March and Simon (1958)



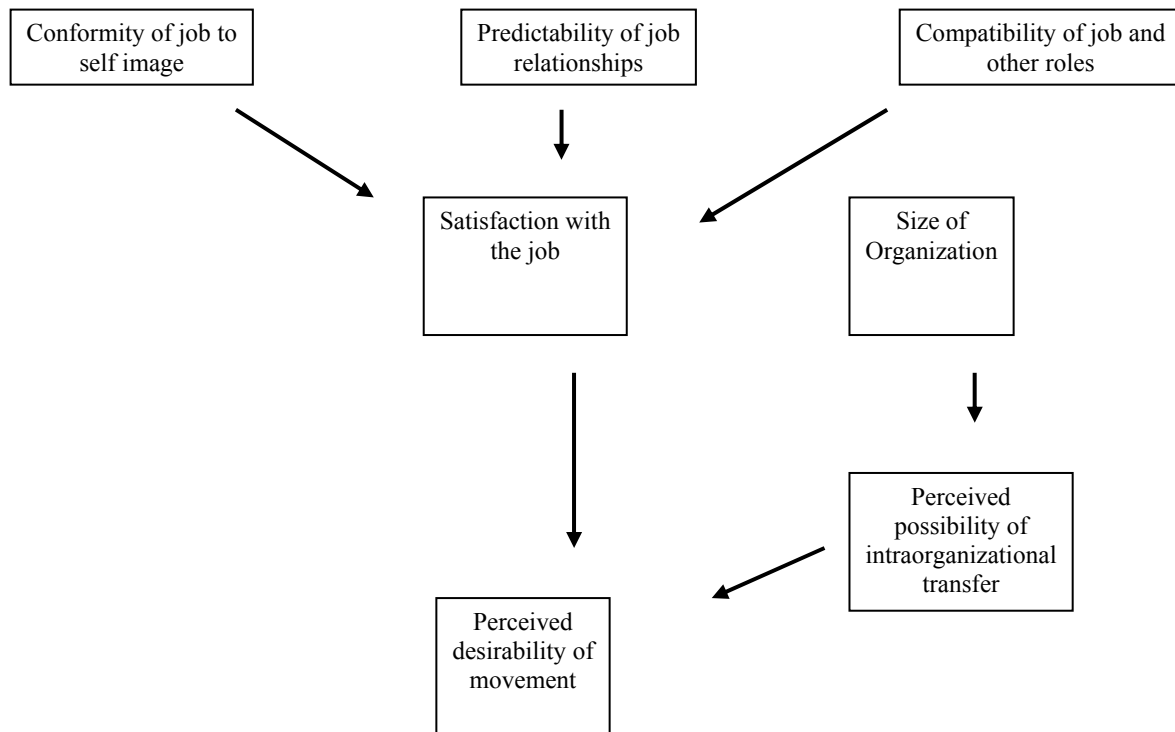


Figure 1. Major Factors Affecting Perceived Desirability of Movement (March & Simon, 1958)

Other researchers have since listed these and other variables as predictors of job satisfaction, but the link between job satisfaction and perceived desirability of movement remains dominant in the literature (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth et al., 2000; Griffeth et al., 2005; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Price, 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Perceived desirability of movement, as modeled by March and Simon (1958), also took into account the size of the organization an employee worked in and the perceived possibility of intra-organizational transfer. Larger organizations offer more job opportunities, and therefore, if an employee is not satisfied with his current job, there is the possibility for him to transfer to another job within the organization thus decreasing or all together negating the employee's desire to leave the organization in search of a more desirable job.

Several researchers have taken March and Simon's (1958) model and expanded it in attempts to further explain employee withdrawal and turnover. The concepts of job satisfaction and job search behavior were researched by Mobley (1977). Mobley (1977) added intermediate steps between job satisfaction and turnover in an effort to further develop March and Simon's original model. The steps identified by Mobley (1977) identified job dissatisfaction as leading to thoughts of quitting. Once employees consider quitting, the cost of quitting is evaluated. If it is determined that the cost of quitting is low, then employees start to search for job alternatives. This search then leads to an evaluation of identified options and a comparison of the outstanding options and employees' current jobs. If the evaluation results in the alternatives being more advantageous than their current jobs, then employees decide to leave the organization resulting in turnover. In 1984 Hom et al. conducted tests of Mobley's (1977) model suggesting that job satisfaction directly influenced thoughts to quit and thoughts of quitting directly resulted in intent to quit. The study suggested that job satisfaction negatively affects turnover and thoughts of quitting positively affects turnover (Hom et al., 1984). See Figure 2 for the model of intermediate linkages created by Mobley (1977).

Another researcher that expanded on the utility of March and Simon's (1958) model was Price (1977). In 1977, Price summarized past research findings on determinants of turnover. He included generalizations about the results of previous research and the degree to which the results were supported. His analysis centered on data from Western countries from 1900 to 1974 focusing on manufacturing firms and blue-collar workers. At the time synthesis, of labor topics did exist, but none focused on

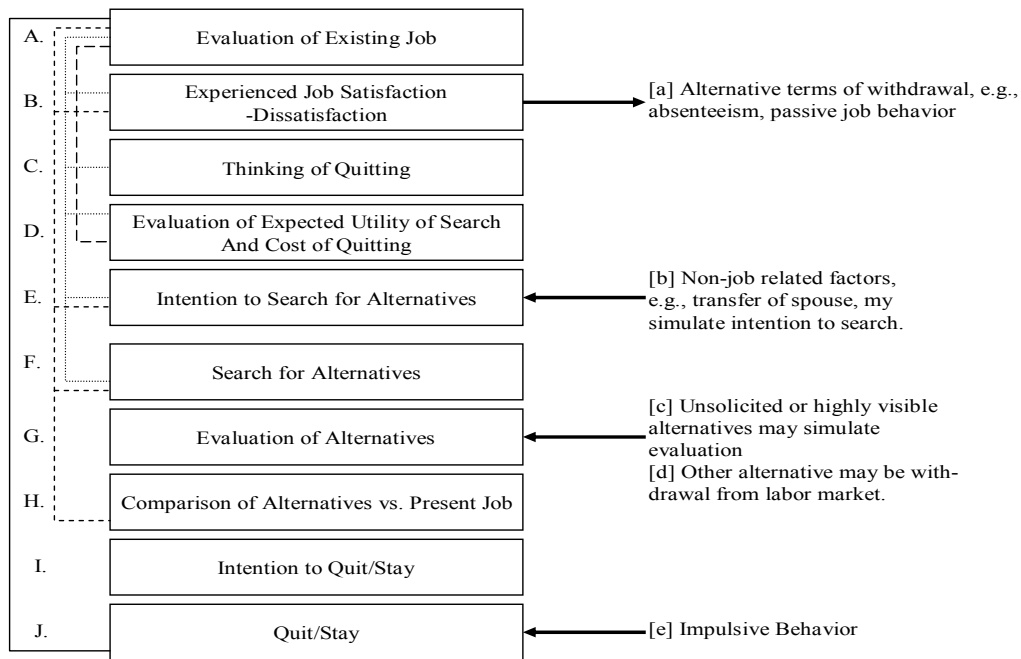


Figure 2. Mobley's 1977 Model of Intermediate Linkages (Mobley, 1977)

the impact of turnover on the organization or the extent of turnover existed. This was believed to be a shortfall in the literature since it was assumed that the impact of turnover on the effectiveness of organizations to meet their goals is what prompted the research of turnover. Price's (1977) efforts culminated in the creation of a causal model depicting what determinants produced turnover and how these determinants operated. His model included: pay, integration, instrumental communication, formal communication, and centralization as determinates; satisfaction is a mediator and opportunity as a moderator of the relationship between satisfaction and turnover (Price, 1977). Price kept with the traditional logic of job satisfaction being the primary factor in determining turnover (March & Simon, 1958). The five determinants he identified included pay, integration,

instrumental communication, formal communication, and centralization, which culminated in a level of job satisfaction, which then predicted whether turnover would occur. Price also included perceived ease of movement, which he termed opportunity, as an intervening variable between job satisfaction and turnover. See Figure 3 for the relationships between the determinants, intervening variables, and turnover model created by Price (1977).

Decreases in pay, integration, instrumental communication, and formal communication and increases in centralization resulted in decreased job satisfaction. If this low job satisfaction occurs at the same time that job opportunities outside the organization are numerous, it was predicted that the rate of turnover will be high.

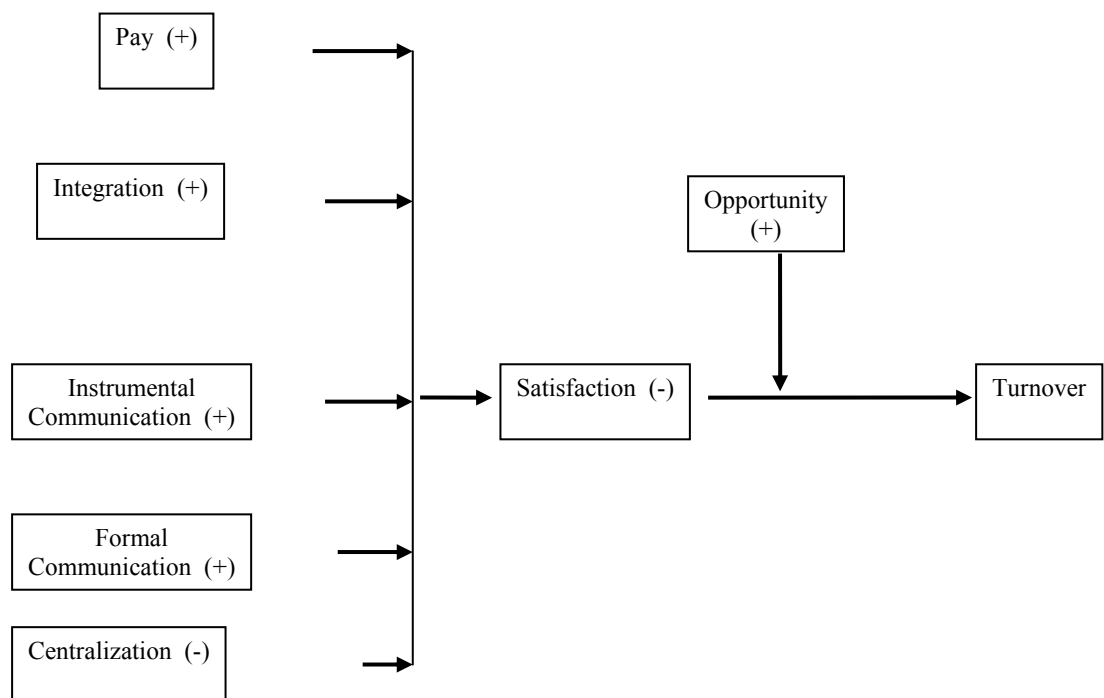


Figure 3. Relationships Between the Determinants, Intervening Variables, and Turnover (Price, 1977)

In 1981, Price and Mueller refined Price's original causal model. The inclusion of voluntary turnover as the dependent variable, 11 determinants (opportunity, routinization, participation, instrumental communication, integration, pay, distributive justice, promotional opportunity, professionalism, general training, and kinship responsibility), and two intervening variables (job satisfaction and intent to stay) were based on the preponderance of usages of these variables and determinants in previous research literature (e.g., Bluedorn, 1976; Bowey, 1974; Burton & Parker, 1969; Clowes, 1972; Farris, 1971; March & Simon, 1958; Porter & Steers, 1973; Price, 1977; Vroom, 1964). Seven of the determinants; routinization, participation, instrumental communication, integration, pay, distributive justice, and promotional opportunity, were believed to directly affect job satisfaction; three of the determinants; professionalism, general training, and kinship responsibility, were predicted to directly affect intent to stay; and low job satisfaction and low intentions to stay were believed to increase turnover (Price & Mueller, 1981). See Figure 4 for the Price and Mueller revised model.

In 1982, Bluedorn suggested that most turnover models in existence complimented each other. In an effort to create an all-encompassing turnover model, Bluedorn synthesized the elements in dominant turnover models. Bluedorn's primary influences were March and Simon (1958), Price (1977), Mobley (1977), and Price and Mueller (1981). Pulling from the models and research of March and Simon (1958) and Price (1977), Bluedorn centered his unified model on job satisfaction as the primary reason employees turnover. Bluedorn included organizational commitment as an intervening variable between job satisfaction and turnover. Based on Price (1977) and further substantiated by Price and Mueller (1981); availability of job alternatives or

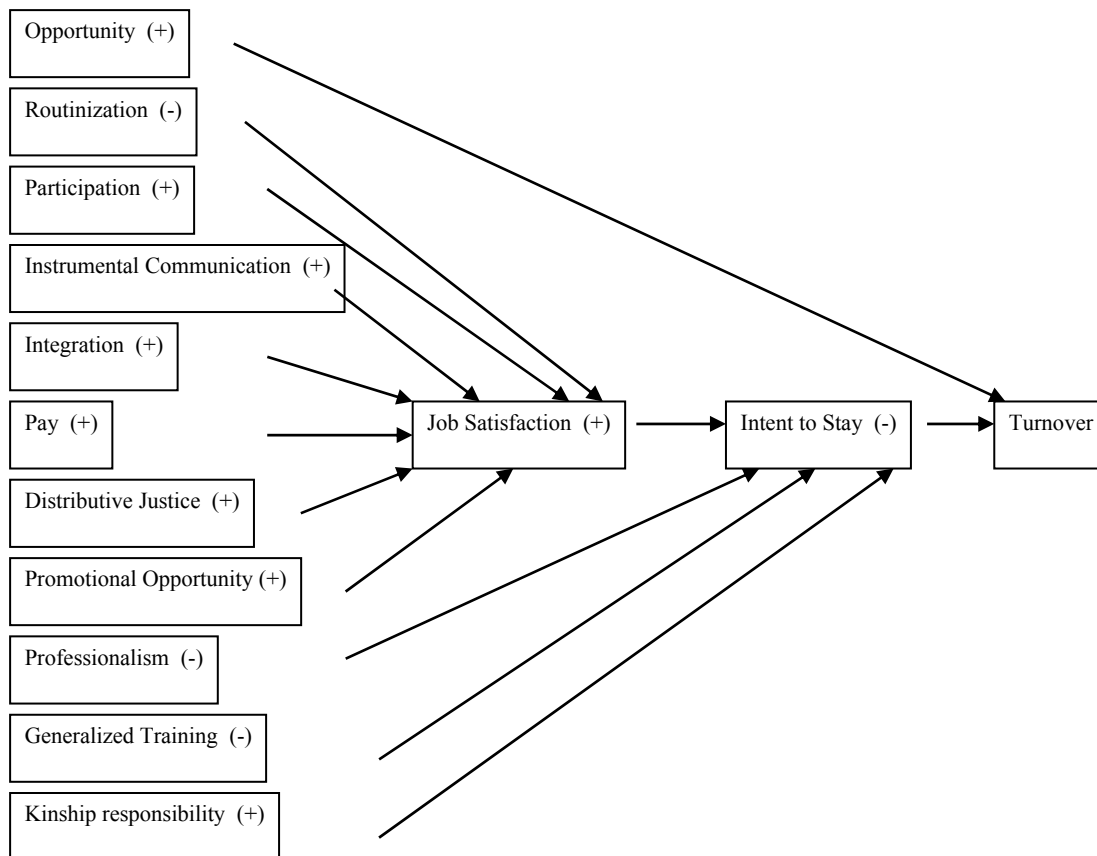


Figure 4. Revised Causal Model of Turnover (Price & Mueller, 1981)

opportunities, was incorporated into the model to account for employees that are dissatisfied but remain at their current jobs due to the lack of other job opportunities.

Intent to stay, as suggested by Price and Mueller (1981), was added to Bluedorn's model and considered the most predictive variable in determining turnover. The resulting model created by Bluedorn was comprised of five criterion variables, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search, intent to leave, and turnover. These criterion variables were preceded by 15 determinant variables; promotional opportunities, centralization, formalization, instrumental communication, equity, pay, routinization, member integration, environmental opportunities, foregone environmental opportunities,

role conflict, length of service, age, education, and marital status. These 15 determinants were believed to directly affect job satisfaction. See Figure 5 for the unified model of turnover created by Bluedorn (1982).

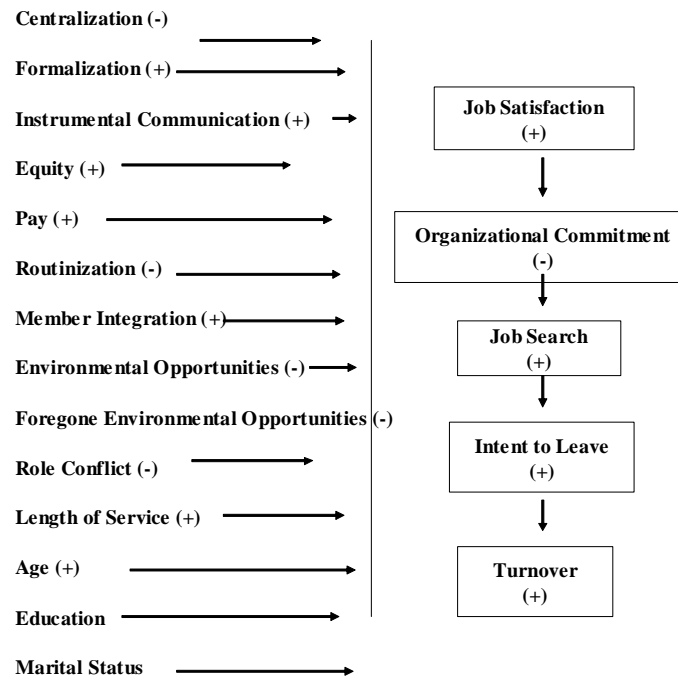


Figure 5. Unified Model of Turnover (Bluedorn, 1982)

Bluedorn conducted data analysis to determine the most significant determinant variables. Of the 15 identified variables, 9 were determined to be significant; instrumental information, equity, age, potential role conflict, promotion opportunities, routinization, education, foregone environmental opportunities and environmental opportunities. Four variables stood out as the most significant and related directly to turnover; environmental opportunity, intentions to stay, routinization, and age. The other five variables did influence turnover but indirectly through the variables; job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to leave. The results of

Bluedorn's (1982) research indicated that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search, and intent to leave were all significant determinate variables of turnover.

Researchers have extensively studied the fundamental models of turnover created by early researchers such as March and Simon (1958). Simon (1958), Price (1977), and Mobley (1977) and the synthesized models developed by later researchers such as Price and Mueller (1981) and Bluedorn (1982). Some researchers have made attempts to culminate all current and historical data on turnover to date and conduct meta-analysis to discover what variables consistently attribute to the variance in turnover intentions.

In 1984, Steel & Ovalle conducted a meta-analysis of 34 studies and determined that current attitudinal variables such as behavioral intentions, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment accounted for only 50% of the variability in turnover. Most recently, but consistent with the findings of Steel & Ovalle (1984), Griffeth et al. (2000) conducted a meta-analysis on a majority of the turnover studies conducted and literature written to date which concluded that only about 50% of the variance in employees' intentions to leave is accounted for using the variables in current turnover models. The meta-analysis did identify significant predictors of turnover including; job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search, and quit intentions. The best predictor was quit intentions followed by organizational commitment and job satisfaction. It was noted that based on the most recent studies on the predictors of turnover, job search was a viable predictor of turnover as well. Among the most recent studies on turnover Griffeth et al. (2005) used job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search behavior, and intent to quit as predictors of turnover. See Figure 6 for the model of turnover process used in Griffeth et al. (2005) study.



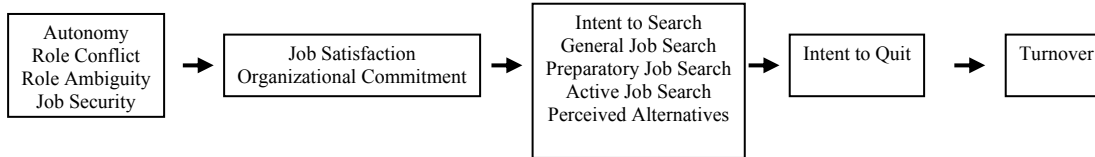


Figure 6. Model of the turnover process used in Griffeth et al.(2005) study (Griffeth et al., 2005)

Steel (2002) argued that the persistent failure of studies to predict significant portions of turnover arose from (a) the methods used and (b) the affective antecedents included in studies of turnover. Accordingly, several recent efforts have addressed both of these issues. Methodologically, Griffeth, et al. (2005) have worked to improve the measurement of an individual's market cognitions by testing the validity and reliability of a multi-dimensional employment opportunity index, arguing that an individual's understanding of employment opportunities is intricately linked to the job search behaviors that are commonly seen in studies of turnover. In an effort to expand the variables included in studies of turnover, Mitchell, Holtum, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) introduced the idea of job embeddedness, a variable representing the organizational and community forces that tend to prevent voluntary turnover. Their initial empirical findings indicated that the concept of embeddedness did explain significant incremental variance in turnover after controlling for traditional predictors (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational commitment). In keeping with research efforts such as Mitchell et al. (2001) to find new affective antecedents that better explain the variance in turnover, this study researched career plateauing as an antecedent of turnover.

### *Career Plateau*

Starting in the 1970s and continuing into the 1980s, researchers started identifying and defining a new construct, termed *career plateau*, in the organizational behavior literature (Bardwick, 1986, Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977; Veiga, 1981). The definition of career plateau evolved from focusing solely on upward promotion to focusing on receiving further assignments of increased responsibility. Ference et al. (1977) defined career plateau as the point where the employee's likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion becomes very unlikely. This definition gave a narrow view of career advancement since only movement up the organizational structure was considered career success. The definition of career plateau presented by Ference et al. (1977) was narrow focusing on upward movement only. In 1981, Veiga expanded the definition to include both upward and lateral moves by defining career plateau as the point at which future career mobility, including both upward and lateral moves, is in reasonable doubt because the length of time in the present position has been unduly prolonged (Veiga, 1981). Veiga's definition stressed long position tenure when compared with the average comparable peer.

Bardwick (1986) expanded the definition of the construct of career plateau presented by earlier researchers by sub-dividing the construct of career plateau into two dimensions: structural plateau and job content plateau. Bardwick defined structural plateauing using the same definition as the Ference et al. (1977) definition of career plateau; the point where the employee's likelihood of additional hierarchical promotion becomes very unlikely. She defined job content plateauing as the point when an individual is no longer challenged by his or her work or job responsibilities. In 1988,

Feldman and Weitz synthesized many previous definitions of career plateau by defining career plateau as the likelihood of not receiving further assignments of increased responsibility, thus combining structural and job content promotions into one concept (Feldman & Weitz, 1988). Though there is no consensus on the definition of career plateau to date, the Feldman and Weitz (1988) definition will be used for this study.

After researching the definition of career plateau, how career plateau was measured began to be studied. The measurement of career plateau evolved from measuring the length of time employees were in their current jobs (Ference et al., 1977; Veiga, 1981) to measuring employees' reactions to statements concerning their current job conditions and future job prospects (Chao, 1990; Milliman, 1992). In 1990, Chao suggested that the best way to determine if a person is career plateaued is to directly ask "do you believe you are career plateaued?" Chao also introduced the idea of using a continuous scale instead of a dichotomous scale to measure career plateauing. Instead of looking at career plateau as being a black or white issue of either "being career plateaued" or "not being career plateaued", Chao acknowledged career plateauing can be a gray issue where people feel different intensities of being either career plateaued or not career plateaued (Chao, 1990).

In the past 20 years, research focused on identifying the differences between career plateaued and non-career plateaued employees (Milliman, 1992; Near, 1985). In 1985, Near conducted research to determine the differences between career plateaued and non-career plateaued employees. Her analysis determined that there were differences between career plateaued and non-career plateaued employees, but the differences were not significant. Motivation and job satisfaction were lower among nonplateaued

employees, but not significantly lower. Nonplateaued managers considered themselves more important than plateaued managers, but their job performance did not vary significantly compared to plateaued managers. Demographically, nonplateaued managers had more education and worked in larger firms than plateaued managers. She further concluded that the differences may not result in negative outcomes in terms of organizational effectiveness. In 1992, Milliman conducted a research study on the causes and consequences of career plateauing. Milliman reported significant relationship between perceptions of being career plateaued and organizational commitment, intention to quit, job involvement, and job satisfaction. Perceptions of being career plateaued were negatively related to organizational commitment, positively related to intention to quit, negatively related to job involvement, and negatively related to job satisfaction.

Studies have been conducted on the impacts of being career plateaued. Not all the studies concluded negative outcomes such as low motivation, low job satisfaction, and low organizational commitment resulting from being career plateaued (Bardwick, 1987; Near, 1985). These studies suggested that career plateaued employees can be considered solid citizens within their organizations. These employees provide stability and a constant work effort that organizations require for success. There is considerable evidence indicating that plateauing is related to negative job attitudes and behaviors (Allen, Russell, Poteet, & Dobbins, 1999; Lee, 2002; Tremblay & Alain, 1993; Tremblay, Roger, & Toulouse, 1995). While not all studies have concluded negative outcomes, such as poor job performance and low job satisfaction, resulting from perceptions of being career plateaued (Bardwick, 1986; Feldman & Weitz, 1988; Ference et al., 1977; Near, 1980; Nicholson, 1993), there is considerable evidence indicating that

plateauing is related to negative job attitudes and behaviors. Employees that are structurally plateaued are absent from work more often (Near, 1980), indicated less satisfaction with their supervisors (Near, 1985), reported more health problems (Near, 1985), more stress (Elsass & Ralston, 1989), greater turnover intentions (Burke, 1989; Tremblay et al., 1995), and greater burnout (Burke, 1989). Studies have also shown employees who believe they are plateaued report lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chao, 1990; Milliman 1992; Tremblay et al., 1995) and lower job performance (Allen et al., 1999). Studies conducted on job content plateauing reported similar results (Allen et al, 1999; Milliman 1992). Perceptions of job content plateauing are believed to be related to lower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and higher levels of turnover.

#### *Turnover and Career Plateau*

Some turnover studies in the past included the concept of career plateau, but were termed intra-organizational transfer or opportunity or promotional opportunity (Bluedorn, 1982; March & Simon, 1958; Price, 1977, Price & Mueller, 1981). These studies found significant relationships between career plateau, as defined by intra-organizational transfer or opportunity or promotional opportunity, and intent to turnover. The definitions of intra-organizational transfer or opportunity or promotional opportunity were created utilizing the concept of only including upward promotion. The new, flatter organizational structures of the past 20 years caused upward promotion to not be the only aspect of career plateauing that needs to be considered when determining how turnover is affected by career plateauing. Lateral movement within the organization and increased

job responsibility without promotion now need to be considered when determining how turnover is affected by career plateauing (Bardwick, 1987; Chao, 1990; Milliman, 1992).

Research studies such as those conducted by Near (1985) and Milliman (1992) took into consideration the definition of career plateau used in this research effort; the likelihood of not receiving further assignments of increased responsibility. The analysis from these studies did show some initial promise in the construct of career plateau to explain workplace attitudes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. These studies cited shortcomings in substantiating employees' perceptions of career plateau, organizational perceptions of employees being career plateaued, and actual career plateau. These studies also cited the need for further investigation on the impacts of career plateau including replicating the current studies.

### *Research Hypotheses*

Previous researchers have reported that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search behavior, and intent to leave account for over 50% of the explained variance in projecting turnover (e.g., Griffeth et al., 2000; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Many studies have recently been conducted in an attempt to explain the remaining 50% of variance (Griffeth et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2001). The purpose of this study was to further research efforts in discovering causes for the 50% of unexplained variance by determining if career plateauing accounts for variance in predicting turnover. This research project introduced and tested a model incorporating models from previous turnover studies and career plateauing. The model tested in this project is depicted in Figure 7.

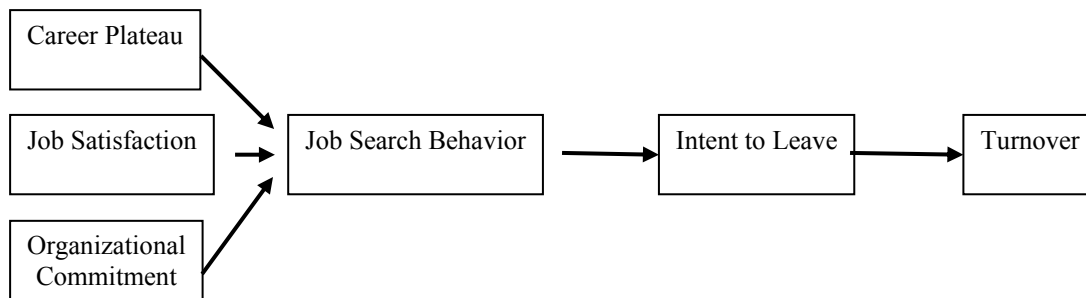


Figure 7. Turnover Model Incorporating Career Plateau

With the lack of consistency in findings, definitions, and measurement of plateauing in empirical research on career plateauing, this research project replicated the method to measure career plateau used by Milliman (1992) to further evaluate how being career plateaued influences employees' intentions to leave their current jobs. Previous research utilized executives, managers, consultants, and professional employees in the civilian sector. This research project utilized a military sample to test the construct of career plateauing as the military represents an organization with definable upward mobility requirements and a homogenous promotion system. In order to test whether the relationship between career plateauing and intent to turnover is similar in a military sample as reported in previous research, the first research hypothesis is:

*H1. Career plateauing will be positively related to intent to leave the organization.*

Continuing with research efforts to expose constructs that further explain the variance in turnover (Griffeth et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2001), this research project sought to determine the amount of variance in employee turnover intentions accounted for by perceptions of being career plateaued. The second hypothesis is:

*H2. Controlling for all appropriate variables; career plateauing will increase the amount of explained variance above and beyond the variances explained by job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job search as related to intent to turnover.*

### **III. Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which career plateauing affects intentions to leave an organization. Surveys were used to gather data, and correlation coefficient and hierarchical regression were the mathematical tools used to analyze the data. Five measures were used in this study; career plateau, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job search behavior, and intent to leave.

#### *Procedures*

Data were collected using a 118-item questionnaire. A summary of the research variables in the career plateauing survey are presented in Table 1 and Appendix A, respectively. The career plateauing survey was administered from September 2004 to November 2004 to three civil engineering squadrons. The questionnaires were mailed to pre-identified points of contact in each organization, who in turn, distributed a questionnaire to each organizational member. A letter stating the purpose of the survey and providing contact information for the researcher was attached to each questionnaire. See Appendix B for the Participant Letter of Instruction. The completed questionnaires were collected by the points of contact and returned to the researcher. Participation was strictly voluntary, and respondents' anonymity was maintained.

#### *Participants*

Approximately 650 military members from Hill Air Force Base, UT, McChord Air Force Air Force Base, WA, and Little Rock Air Force Base, AR, were invited to participate. Data was collected from these three organizations due to the commanders giving permission to survey the members of their squadrons. Each organization was responsible for constructing and maintaining 600 to 800 facilities for Air Force



installations with populations between 6,000 and 22,000. The occupations of the participants varied greatly (e.g., engineers, draftsmen, administration manager, information managers, resource managers, construction craftsmen, emergency managers, fire fighters and bomb squad technicians). Also, the sample represented all levels of management, including the organizations' chief executive officers, high-level management, mid-level management, low-level management, and non-managerial personnel.

Demographic data were addressed in items 88 through 105 of the questionnaire, and included such items as age, gender, race, and income. Data were collected from 334 respondents, and 326 of the surveys returned were useable, resulting in a 51.2% response rate. Of the surveys returned, seven were mailed by the individuals directly to the researcher, and the remaining 327 surveys were returned to the researcher in bulk by the assigned points of contact at each base. The seven questionnaires mailed directly to the researcher were compared against seven randomly selected surveys returned via the bulk collection. No differences were detected. As 17 of the 327 survey participants were officers, these surveys were removed to minimize any potential error due to differences in officer and enlisted samples. After removing unusable surveys and officer surveys, 309 surveys from enlisted respondents comprised the data set used for analysis. The researcher did not have access to the demographics of all 600 personnel who received surveys and were asked to participate in this study, and therefore non-response bias could not be evaluated.

Overall, the average respondent from the 309 usable surveys was male, 27 years of age, had 13 years of formal education, an annual salary between \$20,000 and \$30,000,

7.4 years military service, 4.6 years in current job, and 1.9 years in current rank. A list of demographics from the data sample is provided in Table 1.

Table 1  
Sample Data Demographics

Demographic	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Age	308	19	48	27.30	6.80
Gender	308	1	2	1.11	.31
Rank	309	2	9	4.50	1.45
Salary	304	1	7	2.16	1.06
Education	309	1	9	3.05	.90
Dependents	307	0	5	.91	1.17
Moves	283	0	10	2.59	2.03
Time in Service (months)	303	7	352	88.92	76.61
Time in Rank (months)	299	1	241	22.42	24.23
Time in Job (months)	307	1	265	55.83	59.77

### *Measures*

Five measures were used in the survey, to include: (a) career plateau, (b) job satisfaction, (c) organizational commitment, (d) job search behavior, and (e) intent to leave. The items used in each measure are listed in Table 2.

Table 2  
Variables and Items Inventory

<i>Variable &amp; Source</i>	<i>Items</i>
<b>Intent to Leave</b>	<b>Intent to Stay Items</b>
Kim, Price, Mueller, & Watson (1996)	1. I plan to leave the Air Force as soon as possible.
	2. Under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave the Air Force. (R)
	3. I would be reluctant to leave the Air Force. (R)
	4. I plan to stay in the Air Force as long as possible. (R)

<i>Variable &amp; Source</i>	<i>Items</i>
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	<b>Job Satisfaction Items</b>
Spector (1985)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.</li> <li>2. There is really too little chance for promotion on my job. (R)</li> <li>3. My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.</li> <li>4. I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive. (R)</li> <li>5. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.</li> <li>6. Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult. (R)</li> <li>7. I like the people I work with.</li> <li>8. I sometimes feel my job is meaningless. (R)</li> <li>9. Communications seem good within this squadron.</li> <li>10. Raises are too few and far between. (R)</li> <li>11. Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.</li> <li>12. My supervisor is unfair to me. (R)</li> <li>13. The benefits we receive are as good as what civilian organizations offer.</li> <li>14. I <u>do not</u> feel that the work I do is appreciated. (R)</li> <li>15. My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.</li> <li>16. I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of the people I work with. (R)</li> <li>17. I like doing the things I do at work.</li> <li>18. The goals of this squadron are not clear to me. (R)</li> <li>19. I feel unappreciated by the squadron when I think about what they pay me. (R)</li> <li>20. People get ahead as fast here as they do in other places.</li> <li>21. My supervisor shows too little interest in the feelings of subordinates. (R)</li> <li>22. There are few rewards for those who work here. (R)</li> <li>23. I have too much to do at work. (R)</li> <li>24. I enjoy my coworkers.</li> <li>25. I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the squadron. (R)</li> <li>26. I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.</li> <li>27. I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.</li> <li>28. There are benefits we do not have which we should have. (R)</li> <li>29. I like my supervisor.</li> <li>30. I have too much paperwork. (R)</li> <li>31. I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should. (R)</li> <li>32. I am satisfied with my chances for promotion.</li> <li>33. There is too much bickering and fighting at work. (R)</li> <li>34. My job is enjoyable.</li> <li>35. Work assignments are not fully explained. (R)</li> <li>36. The benefit package (e.g. BAS, BAH, medical, dental, etc.) the Air Force offers is equitable.</li> </ol>

<i>Variable &amp; Source</i>	<i>Items</i>
<b>Organizational Commitment</b> Mowday, Steers, & Porter (1979)	<b>Organizational Commitment Items</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order</li> <li>2. I talk up the Air Force to my friends as a great organization to work for.</li> <li>3. I feel very little loyalty to the Air Force. (R)</li> <li>4. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for the</li> <li>5. I find that my values and the Air Force's values are very similar.</li> <li>6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of the Air Force.</li> <li>7. I could just as well be working for a – civilian organization as long as the type of</li> <li>8. The Air Force really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.</li> <li>9. I am extremely glad that I chose the Air Force to work for over civilian</li> <li>10. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with the Air Force indefinitely. (R)</li> <li>11. Often, I find it difficult to agree with the Air Force's policies on important matters</li> <li>12. I really care about the fate of the Air Force.</li> <li>13. For me the Air Force is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.</li> <li>14. Deciding to work for the Air Force was a definite mistake on my part. (R)</li> </ol>
<b>Job Search Behavior</b> Kopleman, Rovenpor, & Milsap (1992)	<b>Job Search Behavior Items</b> <p>During the <i>past year</i> have you...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read a book about getting a job?</li> <li>2. Revised your resume?</li> <li>3. Sent copies of your resume to a civilian employer?</li> <li>4. Contacted an employment agency or executive search firm to obtain a civilian</li> <li>5. Read the classified/help-wanted advertisements in the newspaper?</li> <li>6. Gone on a job interview for a civilian job?</li> <li>7. Talked to friends or relatives about getting a new civilian job?</li> <li>8. Sought to transfer to a new military job within the Air Force?</li> <li>9. Talked to co-workers about getting a job in a civilian organization outside of the</li> <li>10. Made any telephone inquiries to prospective civilian employers?</li> </ol>
<b>Career Plateau</b> Milliman (1992)	<b>Career Plateau Items</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I expect to be constantly challenged in my job in the future. (R)</li> <li>2. I will learn and grow in my job. (R)</li> <li>3. My job tasks and activities will become routine for me in the future.</li> <li>4. My job responsibilities will increase significantly in the future. (R)</li> <li>5. My job will continually require me to extend my abilities and knowledge. (R)</li> <li>6. I will be challenged in my job. (R)</li> <li>7. My opportunities for upward movement are limited in the Air Force.</li> <li>8. I expect to be promoted frequently in the future in the Air Force. (R)</li> <li>9. The likelihood that I will get ahead in the Air Force is limited.</li> <li>10. I have reached a point where I do not expect to move much higher in the Air Force.</li> <li>11. I am unlikely to obtain a much higher job title in the Air Force.</li> <li>12. I expect to advance to a higher level in the near future in the Air Force. (R)</li> </ol>

**Note.** (R) indicates that the questionnaire item was reversed scored before being analyzed in the regression analysis.

## *Measures*

*Career plateau.* The career plateau measure tapped the attitudes one has towards his career and determined the extent to which an individual perceived he is content and structurally plateaued. This measure was assessed using 12 items used by Milliman (1992). Examples include: (a) I expect to be constantly challenged in my job in the future, (b) I will learn and grow in my job, and (c) my job tasks and activities will become routine for me in the future. These 12 items were answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. These items were modified from their original form to make them organization specific (e.g., “organization” was replaced with “Air Force”). The reported Cronbach’s alpha by Milliman (1992) for plateauing was .87. The reported Cronbach’s alpha for this project was .78. The scale response ranged from 1.33 to 5.83 with a mean of 3.02 ( $SD = .80$ ;  $n = 297$ ).

In addition to the subject measure of career plateau created by Milliman (1992), a *calculated measure of career plateau* was created and utilized during this research project. The calculated measure of career plateau was based on the survey respondent’s current rank and total years of service and was compared to the total years of service of those promoted in the 2003 promotion cycle. One standard deviation was used to determine the total years of service required to be considered within the on-track range of career progression. Setting one standard deviation as the cutting point for determining if someone is on-track, places 68% of the promotion population in the on-track category. The remaining 32% fall either in the fast-track or slow-track category, and 16% fall specifically in the slow-track and can be considered career plateaued. The scale for this item ranged from 1 to 3 (1 = fast-track, 2 = on-track, 3 = slow-track). A response of “1”

could be viewed as being not career plateaued; a response of “2” could be viewed as being neither career plateaued or not career plateaued; and a response of “3” could be viewed as being career plateaued.

*Job Satisfaction.* Participants’ job satisfaction was assessed using 36 items used by Spector (1985). The 36 questions assessed nine facets of job satisfaction. These nine sub-scales were (a) pay (items 1, 10, 19, 27), (b) promotion (items 2, 11, 20, 32), (c) supervision (items 3, 12, 21, 29), (d) fringe benefits (items 4, 13, 28, 36), (e) contingent rewards (items 5, 14, 22, 31), (f) operating procedures (items 6, 15, 23, 30), (g) coworkers (items 7, 16, 24, 33), (h) nature of work (items 8, 17, 26, 34), and (i) communication (items 9, 18, 25, 36). Questions within each of the nine facets included (a) I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do, (b) there is really too little chance for promotion on my job, (c) my supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job, (d) I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive, (e) when I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive, (f) many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult, (g) I like the people I work with, (h) I sometimes feel my job is meaningless, and (i) communications seem good within this squadron. The nine sub-scales were combined to create an overall measure of job satisfaction. These 36 items were answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from *disagree very much* to *agree very much*. The reported Cronbach’s alpha by Spector (1985) was .89. The reported Cronbach’s alpha for this project was .90. The scale response ranged from 1.92 to 5.47 with a mean of 3.92 ( $SD = 0.64$ ;  $n = 272$ ).

*Organizational Commitment.* Participants’ organizational commitment was measured using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by

Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). This instrument measured the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. The instrument focused on three areas; (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. This item was slightly modified from the item originally presented by Mowday et al. (1979) by replacing "this company" with "the Air Force". Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the 14 items using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Examples included (a) I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the Air Force be successful, (b) I talk up the Air Force to my friends as a great organization to work for, (c) I feel very little loyalty to the Air Force, and (d) I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for the Air Force. The reported Cronbach's alpha by Mowday et al. (1979) was .82. The reported Cronbach's alpha for this project was .88. The scale response ranged from 1.36 to 7.00 with a mean of 4.89 ( $SD = 0.97$ ;  $n = 303$ ).

*Job Search.* The Job Search Behavior Index (JSBI) was used to assess participants' job search behaviors (Kopelman, Rovenpor, & Millsap, 1992). Prior to administration, the 10 items were modified where "outside of the Air Force" was added to exclude job search behaviors toward getting a new position within the Air Force. However, consistent with Kopelman et al. (1992), participants responded *yes* or *no* to each of the items. Yes and no responses were recoded to "1" and "0", and a count variable was computed from 0 to 10, with a higher score indicating more job search

activity. The reported Cronbach's alpha by Kopelman et al. (1992) was .79. The reported Cronbach's alpha for this project was .76. The scale response ranged from 0 to 10 with a mean of 2.44 ( $SD = 2.3$ ;  $n = 307$ ).

*Intent to Leave.* Intent to stay was assessed using a 4-item scale. Examples included (a) I plan to leave the Air Force as soon as possible, (b) under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave the Air Force, and (c) I would be reluctant to leave the Air Force. These items were originally used by Kim, Price, Mueller, and Watson (1996). Consistent with these researchers, participants indicated their level of agreement with each of these statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The Cronbach's alpha reported by Kim et al. was .85. The Cronbach's alpha reported in this study was .85. The scale response ranged from 1 to 5 with a mean of 2.67 ( $SD = 0.1.03$ ;  $n = 302$ ).



## IV. Results

The purpose of this research project was to determine if perceptions of being career plateaued were correlated to intentions of leaving an organization, and if perceptions of being career plateaued further explained variance in intentions to leave an organization. This chapter presents a summary of the results from this research project. First, steps taken to determine the final sample size and control variables used for this research are explained. Second, evaluation and results from the first hypothesis are discussed. Third, and lastly, results and evaluation from the second hypothesis are discussed.

### *Data*

Analysis of the data was conducted to determine if the variables representing the demographics of the respondents were normal and homogenous. Of the 334 surveys returned, 326 were completely filled out and could be used in the analysis. Histogram curves were visually analyzed to determine normality and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if the demographic variables to include age, gender, rank, salary, education, number of dependents, number of moves, time in career field, and time in current job and measures of career plateau, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to leave from the three different bases, were homogenous. Homogeneity of the data from the three different bases allowed the researcher to consider the respondents from the three different bases as one data set during data analysis. Analysis of both the demographic variables and the measures showed no significant variances between the respondents' demographic data as well as from the measures reported for the respondents (age ( $F = .89, p < .41$ ); gender ( $F = 1.25$ ,

$p < .29$ ); education ( $F = 2.75, p < .07$ ); dependents ( $F = .61, p < .55$ ); remaining service commitment ( $F = .06, p < .94$ ); career plateau ( $F = .56, p < .57$ ); job satisfaction ( $F = .78, p < .46$ ); organizational commitment ( $F = .41, p < .66$ ); job search behavior ( $F = .68, p < .51$ ); intent to leave ( $F = .12, p < .89$ )). Based on this analysis, the researcher decided to consider all three bases as a homogenous group for data analysis. An additional constraint, using data only from respondents that had 10 years of military service or less, was imposed. Military members are allowed to retire at 20 years of service with retirement pay of 50% of their base pay. At 10 years of service, the financial benefit of the retirement package may weigh heavily on service members' decisions not to leave the military since the member is already 10 years invested into the retirement package, and thus, override any other work attributes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This constraint was imposed to reduce potential error introduced as a result of the military retirement compensation package and the potential to influence turnover intentions beyond 10 years of service. Using only respondents with 10 years of military service or less reduced the data set from  $n = 309$  to  $n = 223$ . The officer cases were also removed from the data since the number of officer respondents ( $n = 17$ ), was small compared to the number of total number of enlisted respondents ( $n = 309$ ). Once all the data refinement was completed, the number of cases used in the analysis of the two hypotheses was 223.

#### *Control Variables*

It was determined through reviews of the literature and through analysis of the data identifying significant correlation coefficients to use age (Milliman, 1992; Near, 1985), gender (Milliman, 1992), number of dependents, education (Milliman, 1992), and

remaining service commitment as control variables. Demographic variables with significant correlations with intent to leave were identified as possible control variables. In a military sample age is directly correlated to other variables such as rank, time in service, salary, and time in current job. Since age is strongly correlated to all of these variables, it was decided to use age as the control variable.

### *Hypothesis One*

The first hypothesis sought to determine if career plateauing was positively related to intent to leave an organization. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between career plateau and intent to leave the organization utilizing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12.0. A Pearson correlation coefficient, symbolized  $r$ , is a measure of strength of association between two variables. A Pearson correlation coefficient can be either positive, signifying a positive association, or negative, signifying a negative association. The greater the absolute value of the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ), the greater the strength of association. The measure of career plateau was the 12-question, 7-point measure developed by Milliman in 1992 and the intent to leave measure was the 4-question, 5-point measure developed by Kim et al. in 1996. The resulting Pearson correlation coefficient was .46 ( $p < .01$ ), supporting hypothesis 1. A matrix of the correlations between control, dependent, and independent variables is provided in Appendix C.

Data on the calculated measure of career plateau was available to the researcher, and therefore, exploratory research comparing the subjective measure of career plateau and the calculated measure of career plateau was conducted. The correlation between the subjective career plateau measure presented by Milliman (1992) using a 12-question, 7-

point measure and the calculated measure was not significant ( $r = .19, p = .11$ ).

Hypothesis 1 was also evaluated using the calculated measure of career plateau. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the calculated career plateau and intent to leave the organization and was not significant. ( $r = .21, p = .08$ ). In sum, hypothesis 1 was supported when utilizing the subjective measure of career plateau, but not supported when utilizing the calculated measure of career plateau. *Hypothesis Two*

Hypothesis two sought to determine if perceptions of being career plateaued increase the amount of explained variance above and beyond the variance explained by job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job search behavior while controlling for age, gender, education, dependents, and number of dependents as related to one's intent to turnover. The model presented in hypothesis two suggested that job search behavior mediated the relationship between the independent variables career plateau, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment and the dependent variable intent to leave. Therefore, before testing hypothesis two, mediated regression was used to test if job search behavior acted as a mediator between the independent variables career plateau, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment and the dependent variable intent to leave. Four criteria needed to be met to establish that job search behavior mediates the relationship between the dependent variable intent to leave and the independent variables career plateau, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. First, the independent variable (i.e., career plateau, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment) needed to be associated with the mediator variable (job search behavior). Second, the mediator variable (job search behavior) needed to be associated with the dependent variable (intent to leave). Third, the independent variables (i.e., career plateau, job satisfaction, and

organizational commitment) needed to be associated with the dependent variable (intent to leave). Forth, and lastly, the independent variables (i.e., career plateau, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment) needed not to be associated with the dependent variable (intent to leave), after the mediator variable (job search behavior) is controlled for (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Each predictor was independently evaluated using job search behavior as the mediator as well as evaluating job search behavior and the predictor variables together. The four criteria were met for the predictor variables job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The first three criteria were met for the predictor variable career plateau, but the fourth criteria was not met, suggesting that job search behavior does not mediate the relationship between the independent variable career plateau and the dependent variable intent to leave. A Sobel test was also conducted to verify the results of the mediated regression (Sobel, 1982). A Sobel test is a statistical test that determines whether significant mediation has occurred. A Sobel test was run on each of the three independent. The Sobel tests for job satisfaction and organizational commitment produced  $z$ -values of -7.10 and -5.48, respectively, which were greater than the required absolute value of at least 1.96 to suggest partial mediation at a significance level of .05. The Sobel Test for career plateau produced a  $z$ -value .02, which was less than the required absolute value of at least 1.96 to suggest partial mediation at a significance level of .05. Results from the mediated regressions and Sobel tests suggested that job search behavior does mediate the relationship between the independent variables job satisfaction, and organizational commitment and the dependent variable intent to leave. The results from the mediated regressions and Sobel test also suggested that job search

behavior does not mediate the relationship between the independent variable career plateau and the dependent variable intent to leave. The results from this research study concerning job satisfaction and organizational commitment mirrored historical research (Bluedorn, 1982; Griffeth et al., 2005) suggesting that job search behavior mediated the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment and intent to leave. Results from this study did not support the suggestion that job search behavior mediates the relationship between career plateau and intent to leave.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using hierarchical multiple regression utilizing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12.0. The predictor variables included; career plateau, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job search behavior and the control variables included; age, gender, education, number of dependents, and remaining service commitment. Step one of the hierarchical regression controlled for the control variables ( $R^2 = .10, p < .01$ ), step two controlled for the predictor variables job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job search behavior ( $\Delta R^2 = .49, p < .01$ ), and lastly step three analyzed the impacts of career plateau ( $\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .01$ ) on intent to turnover. Career plateau accounted for 2.2% of increased variance over that explained by job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job search behavior, for a total explained variance of 60.8% in the model. This result provides support for hypothesis 2.

Similar to hypothesis 1, hypothesis 2 was also tested utilizing the calculated career plateau measure. The amount of explained variance in intent to leave an organization due to the calculated career plateau measure was lower than the subjective career plateau measure and not significant (calculated measure  $R^2 = .003, p = .54$  vs. subjective measure  $R^2 = .02, p < .01$ ). This finding, though contrary to the hypothesis, is

significant as it suggests that employees' intentions of leaving an organization are not influenced by the organization's calculated evaluation of an employee's level of career plateau.

## V. Discussion

This chapter presents the conclusions from this research study. Limitations to the findings of this study and the influences to this research are presented. Future research possibilities are suggested based on the findings and limitations experienced in this research effort. This study evaluated whether reaching a plateau in one's career affects one's desire to stay with or leave the organization at which he works. Reaching a career plateau can be caused by either reaching a point where a person will no longer be promoted or by reaching a point where the tasks performed by a person in a certain job will not change in the future. The results of this study supported the belief that the more a person feels career plateaued, the more the person thinks about leaving his job.

There are a number of findings in this research. First, the data analysis suggested that career plateau is positively associated with intentions to leave an organization. Second, it is suggested that career plateau did account for variance in turnover intentions. Third, it is suggested that the subjective measure of career plateau provided a stronger explanatory power to account for the variability in turnover intentions than that provided by an organizational standard of career plateau. These results were similar to previous results (Chao, 1990; Lee, 2003; Tremblay et al., 1995), though these studies were based on age and tenure only and not on an organizationally-established promotion system like the one utilized in this study. Exploratory research suggested that career plateau was negatively associated with job satisfaction ( $r = -.51, p < .01$ ) and organizational ( $r = -.52, p < .01$ ) commitment and positively associated with job search behaviors ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ), but that the calculated measure of career plateau was not significantly correlated to either job satisfaction or job search behaviors and much less correlated to organizational



commitment with less significance. Thus, the results of this research effort indicated that career plateau is a relevant concept and that organizations need to acknowledge that perceptions of career plateau are important factors employees' utilized when determining their attitudes at work and turnover intentions.

### *Limitations*

There are many limitations to the results found in this research effort. First, the data was collected using self-report instruments. Consistency and social desirability are potential issues to using self-report instruments. When answering the questions on the survey, respondents may have the desire to answer the questions consistently throughout the survey and consistent with the expectations of the organization and society as a whole. Second, the data was collected from one source at one point in time. Common methods variance is the impact of collecting data from one source at one time (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The only data collection method used was surveys. Respondents answering the questions on the survey may have negative or positive opinions of surveys that result in overly positive or negative responses to the survey questions. The data were collected only once and at one point in time. Respondents taking the survey may have encountered an event on the day of taking the survey that caused them to respond overly positive or negative to the questions asked on the survey. Third, self-reports were used to measure current position and total time with the organization. The survey asked respondents to provide their current position and total time working for the organization, but this information was not verified using personnel records. Forth, neither actual turnover nor performance were measured. The survey asked respondents if they intended to leave or stay with the organization they currently worked for, but this research effort

did not include following-up with respondents to verify whether they actually did leave or stay with the organization. Additionally, performance information were not collected; thus, it was not possible to determine if a relationship existed between performance and perceptions of being plateaued. Previous research efforts concluded that the measure of intent to turnover accounts for 50% of actual turnover. Fifth and lastly, generalizing the findings of this research project to employees outside of the military might be limited. The sample used in this research project consisted of military personnel, and therefore, the findings from this study might not be applicable to non-military employees. In the military, personnel can retire after 20 years of service as opposed to the traditional 40 years of employment required for retirement in the civilian sector.

Steps were taken to limit the impacts of the above mentioned limitations. First, anonymous surveys were used to collect the research data in order to decrease the instances of consistency and social desirability. Second, survey respondents were informed that the analysis of the data would be done on a unit level and not on an individual level. Knowing their individual responses would not be tracked or analyzed decreased the instances of consistency and social desirability. Third, separation of measurements within the survey was used to decrease the impacts of common method variance. Fourth, scale re-ordering was also used to decrease the impacts of common method variance. Using different scaling and reverse scoring kept respondents from falling into to a constant answer without regard to their true feelings and opinions about the questions asked. Fifth and lastly, consistent administration procedures were used at all three of the testing sites. Identical instructions were given to the survey administrators and to the survey participants.

### *Future Research*

This research project suggests career plateau does contribute to explaining the variability in turnover, and one's level of career plateau does correlate to one's intent to leave an organization. This study presented a number of avenues for future research. First, this study needs to be replicated using other employee groups outside of a military sample. Second, organizational assessments verses personal assessments of career plateau need to be investigated. Third, longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine if employee's perceptions of being career plateaued change over time. Fourth, and last, the impacts of career plateau on individual work performance and overall organizational performance need to be investigated.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this research effort attempted to determine the turnover outcomes of career plateau. Career plateau did account for variability in turnover intentions and career plateau did positively correlate to turnover intentions. Therefore career plateau should be of concern to organizations trying to be successful. Organizations should be concerned with who is career plateaued in the organization, the impact of career plateau on the individual and the organization, and steps the organization can take to decrease the causes and mitigate the effects of career plateau.

## **Appendix A: Career Plateauing Survey**

### **Career Plateauing Survey**

**Purpose:** To conduct research on a new concept called career plateauing and to determine if it is a key factor in understanding why individuals choose to stay in the military. Career plateauing represents the extent to which people are challenged by their jobs and feel they have will be promoted in the future.

**Participation:** We would greatly appreciate your participation in our data collection effort. Your participation is COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. Your decision to not participate or to withdrawal from participation will not jeopardize your relationship with the Air Force Institute of Technology, the U.S. Air Force, or the Department of Defense.

**Confidentiality:** We ask for some demographic information in order to interpret results more accurately. ALL ANSWERS ARE ANONYMOUS. No one other than the research team will see your completed questionnaire. Findings will be reported at the group level only. Reports summarizing trends in large groups may be published.

**Contact information:** If you have any questions or comments about the survey, contact Capt Christine Rilovick at the telephone numbers, fax, mailing addresses, or e-mail addresses listed below. You may take the cover sheet with the contact information for future reference.

---

---

#### ***Capt Christine Rilovick***

---

AFIT/ENV BLDG 641 / Room 202O  
2950 Hobson Way  
Wright-Patterson AFB OH 45433-7765  
Email: christine.rilovick@afit.edu  
Advisor: sharon.heilmann@afit.edu  
Phone: DSN 785-3636x4553, commercial (937) 255-3636x4553  
Fax: DSN 986-4699; commercial (937) 656-4699

---

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

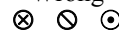
- Base your answers on your own thoughts and experiences
- Please print your answers clearly when asked to write in a response or when providing comments
- Make dark marks when asked to use specific response options (feel free to use an ink pen)
- Avoid stray marks. If you make corrections, erase marks completely or clearly indicate the intended response if you use an ink pen

#### **MARKING EXAMPLES**

Right



Wrong



**THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK**

## **YOUR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AIR FORCE**

**Unless otherwise specified the questions in this section, refer to how you perceive your job and promotion opportunities in the Air Force.**

**For each statement, please fill in the circle for the number that indicates the extent to which you agree with each statement. Use the scale below for your responses.**

	① Strongly Disagree	② Disagree	③ Mildly Disagree	④ Neither Agree Nor Disagree	⑤ Mildly Agree	⑥ Agree	⑦ Strongly Agree
1. I expect to be constantly challenged in my job in the future.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. My opportunities for upward movement are limited in the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. I will learn and grow in my job.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. I expect to be promoted frequently in the future in the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
5. My job tasks and activities will become routine for me in the future.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
6. I definitely want to be promoted.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
7. My job responsibilities will increase significantly in the future.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
8. It is important to me to be promoted.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
9. My job will continually require me to extend my abilities and knowledge.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
10. The likelihood that I will get ahead in the Air Force is limited.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
11. The likelihood that I will get ahead in civilian employment is limited.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
12. I have reached a point where I do not expect to move much higher in the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
13. I have reached a point in my career where I would not expect to move much higher in another company outside of the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
14. I am unlikely to obtain a much higher job title in the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
15. I am unlikely to obtain a much higher job title in another company outside of the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
16. I expect to advance to a higher level in the near future in the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Mildly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
17. I desire to move up to higher levels in the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
18. I will be challenged in my job.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
19. I would take a lateral move if it involved interesting work or required new skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
20. I would take a lateral move if it involved an increase in pay or status.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

## **JOB SATISFACTION**

**We would like to understand how you generally feel about work. For each statement, please fill in the circle for the number that indicates the extent to which you agree the statement is true. Use the scale below for your responses.**

① Disagree Very Much	② Disagree Moderately	③ Disagree Slightly	④ Agree Slightly	⑤ Agree Moderately	⑥ Agree Very Much	
21. I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
22. There is really too little chance for promotion on my job.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
23. My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
24. I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
25. When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
26. Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
27. I like the people I work with.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
28. I sometimes feel my job is meaningless.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
29. Communications seem good within this squadron.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
30. Raises are too few and far between.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
31. Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
32. My supervisor is unfair to me.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥

① Disagree Very Much	② Disagree Moderately	③ Disagree Slightly	④ Agree Slightly	⑤ Agree Moderately	⑥ Agree Very Much	
33. The benefits we receive are as good as what civilian organizations offer.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
34. I <u>do not</u> feel that the work I do is appreciated.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
35. My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
36. I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of the people I work with.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
37. I like doing the things I do at work.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
38. The goals of this squadron are not clear to me.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
39. I feel unappreciated by the squadron when I think about what they pay me.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
40. People get ahead as fast here as they do in other places.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
41. My supervisor shows too little interest in the feelings of subordinates.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
42. There are few rewards for those who work here.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
43. I have too much to do at work.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
44. I enjoy my coworkers.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
45. I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the squadron.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
46. I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
47. I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
48. There are benefits we do not have which we should have.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
49. I like my supervisor.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
50. I have too much paperwork.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
51. I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
52. I am satisfied with my chances for promotion.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
53. There is too much bickering and fighting at work.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
54. My job is enjoyable.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
55. Work assignments are not fully explained.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥



① Disagree Very Much	② Disagree Moderately	③ Disagree Slightly	④ Agree Slightly	⑤ Agree Moderately	⑥ Agree Very Much
56. The benefit package (e.g. BAS, BAH, medical, dental, etc.) the Air Force offers is equitable.					
	①	②	③	④	⑤ ⑥

**Please use the scale below to rate your SATISFACTION**

① Very Dissatisfied	② Dissatisfied	③ Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	④ Satisfied	⑤ Very Satisfied
57. With working for the Air Force – overall.				
	①	②	③	④ ⑤
58. With the nature of the work you perform.				
	①	②	③	④ ⑤
59. With working for your current squadron – overall.				
	①	②	③	④ ⑤

### **ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT**

**We would like to understand how you generally feel about your organizational commitment. For each statement, please fill in the circle for the number that indicates the extent to which you agree the statement is true. Use the scale below for your responses.**

① Strongly Disagree	② Disagree	③ Slightly Disagree	④ Neither Agree Nor Disagree	⑤ Slightly Agree	⑥ Agree	⑦ Strongly Agree
60. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the Air Force be successful.						
	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ ⑦
61. I talk up the Air Force to my friends as a great organization to work for.						
	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ ⑦
62. I feel very little loyalty to the Air Force.						
	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ ⑦
63. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for the Air Force.						
	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ ⑦
64. I find that my values and the Air Force's values are very similar.						
	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ ⑦
65. I am proud to tell others that I am part of the Air Force.						
	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ ⑦
66. I could just as well be working for a – civilian organization as long as the type of work was similar.						
	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ ⑦

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
67. The Air Force really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
68. I am extremely glad that I chose the Air Force to work for over civilian organizations I was considering at the time I joined.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
69. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with the Air Force indefinitely.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
70. Often, I find it difficult to agree with the Air Force's policies on important matters relating to its employees.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
71. I really care about the fate of the Air Force.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
72. For me the Air Force is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
73. Deciding to work for the Air Force was a definite mistake on my part.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

## **JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR**

**The next questions involve the different activities people engage in when they start to look for a new job. For Questions 74 through 83, please mark any items that apply when completing the phrase:**

**During the *past year* have you...**

- ☐ 74. Read a book about getting a job?
- ☐ 75. Revised your resume?
- ☐ 76. Sent copies of your resume to a civilian employer?
- ☐ 77. Contacted an employment agency or executive search firm to obtain a civilian job?
- ☐ 78. Read the classified/help-wanted advertisements in the newspaper?
- ☐ 79. Gone on a job interview for a civilian job?
- ☐ 80. Talked to friends or relatives about getting a new civilian job?
- ☐ 81. Sought to transfer to a new military job within the Air Force?
- ☐ 82. Talked to co-workers about getting a job in a civilian organization outside of the Air Force.
- ☐ 83. Made any telephone inquiries to prospective civilian employers?

## **INTENT TO STAY**

**We would like to understand your feelings about your intention to leave the military. For each statement, please fill in the circle for the number that indicates the extent to which you agree with each statement. Use the scale below for your responses:**

① Strongly Disagree	② Disagree	③ Neither Agree Nor Disagree	④ Agree	⑤ Strongly Agree
84. I plan to leave the Air Force as soon as possible.			① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
85. Under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave the Air Force.			① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
86. I would be reluctant to leave the Air Force.			① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
87. I plan to stay in the Air Force as long as possible.			① ② ③ ④ ⑤	

**This section contains items regarding your personal characteristics. These items are very important for statistical purposes. Respond to each item by **WRITING** in the information requested or **FILLING** in the corresponding circles that best describe you.**

88. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years

89. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

90. What is your race?

- ☐ White                      ☐ Hispanic                      ☐ Native American  
☐ Black                        ☐ Asian                        ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

91. What is your highest education level?

- ☐ GED  
☐ High School  
☐ Some College  
☐ Associates Degree  
☐ Bachelor Degree  
☐ Graduate Degree  
☐ Doctorate  
☐ Post Doctorate  
☐ Professional

92. What is your current rank?

- |                           |                           |                           |                            |                            |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> E-1 | <input type="radio"/> E-4 | <input type="radio"/> E-7 | <input type="radio"/> O-1  | <input type="radio"/> O-2E | <input type="radio"/> O-4 |
| <input type="radio"/> E-2 | <input type="radio"/> E-5 | <input type="radio"/> E-8 | <input type="radio"/> O-1E | <input type="radio"/> O-3  | <input type="radio"/> O-5 |
| <input type="radio"/> E-3 | <input type="radio"/> E-6 | <input type="radio"/> E-9 | <input type="radio"/> O-2  | <input type="radio"/> O-3E | <input type="radio"/> O-6 |

93. What is your current gross annual salary range (do not consider spouse's income)?

- |                                     |                                     |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> \$10K - \$20K | <input type="radio"/> \$20K - \$30K | <input type="radio"/> \$30K - \$40K | <input type="radio"/> \$40K - \$50K |
| <input type="radio"/> \$50 - \$60K  | <input type="radio"/> \$60K - \$70K | <input type="radio"/> \$70K - \$80K | <input type="radio"/> \$80K+        |

94. What is your current gross annual salary range (consider all sources of income)?

- |                                     |                                     |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> \$10K - \$20K | <input type="radio"/> \$20K - \$30K | <input type="radio"/> \$30K - \$40K | <input type="radio"/> \$40K - \$50K |
| <input type="radio"/> \$50 - \$60K  | <input type="radio"/> \$60K - \$70K | <input type="radio"/> \$70K - \$80K | <input type="radio"/> \$80K-\$120K  |
| <input type="radio"/> \$120K+       |                                     |                                     |                                     |

95. What is your total time-in-service (Total Federal Active Service)? Years \_\_\_\_\_  
Months \_\_\_\_\_

96. What is your total time-in-grade? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

97. During your active duty career, how many permanent changes of station (PCSs) have you made? (include PCS for remote or unaccompanied tour)?

- |                         |                                  |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 6          |
| <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 7          |
| <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 8          |
| <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 9          |
| <input type="radio"/> 5 | <input type="radio"/> 10 or more |

98. What is your primary AFSC? \_\_\_\_\_

99. What is the civilian equivalent to your job? \_\_\_\_\_

For the following question "legal dependent" is defines as "anyone in your family, except your spouse, who has or is eligible to have a Uniformed Service identification card (military ID card) or is eligible for military health care benefits and is enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

100. How many legal dependents do you have (do not include spouse)?

- ☐ 0  
☐ 1  
☐ 2  
☐ 3  
☐ 4  
☐ 5 or more

101. How long have you been in your current unit? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

102. How long have you been in your current job? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

103. How long have you been in your current base? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

104. How long is your remaining service commitment? Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

105. What squadron and flight are you in? (examples – civil engineering and engineering, CES and operations, civil engineering and resources, CES and orderly room)

---

106. Suppose that you have to decide whether to stay on active duty. Assuming you could stay, how likely is it that you would choose to do so?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very unlikely

107. If you stay on active duty, when would you expect your next promotion to a higher grade?

- ☐ Less than 3 months
- ☐ 3 months to less than 7 months
- ☐ 7 months to less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 year to less than 2 years
- ☐ 2 years to less than 4 years
- ☐ 4 years or more
- ☐ I do not expect a promotion
- ☐ I have no opportunities for promotion

108. If you could stay on active duty as long as you want, how likely is it that you would choose to serve in the military for at least 20 years?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very unlikely
- ☐ I already have 20 or more years of service

109. Did you receive the military occupation of your choice when you originally came on active duty?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, but I received a related occupation
- ☐ No, I received an occupation unrelated to my choice

110. How satisfied are you now with the military occupation you received when you first entered active duty?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

111. When you first entered active duty service, what was your initial perception of a successful Air Force career?

- ☐ achieving a certain rank (go to question 112)
- ☐ achieving 20 years of military service (skip question 113)
- ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_ (skip question 113)

112. Based on your answer in the previous question, what rank did you believe represented a successful career?

- |                           |                           |                           |                            |                            |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> E-1 | <input type="radio"/> E-4 | <input type="radio"/> E-7 | <input type="radio"/> O-1  | <input type="radio"/> O-2E | <input type="radio"/> O-4 |
| <input type="radio"/> E-2 | <input type="radio"/> E-5 | <input type="radio"/> E-8 | <input type="radio"/> O-1E | <input type="radio"/> O-3  | <input type="radio"/> O-5 |
| <input type="radio"/> E-3 | <input type="radio"/> E-6 | <input type="radio"/> E-9 | <input type="radio"/> O-2  | <input type="radio"/> O-3E | <input type="radio"/> O-6 |

113. Now what is your initial perception of a successful Air Force career?

- ☐ achieving a certain rank (go to question 114)
- ☐ achieving 20 years of military service (skip question 115)
- ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_ (skip question 115)

114. Now at the current time, what rank do you believe represents a successful career?

- |                           |                           |                           |                            |                            |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> E-1 | <input type="radio"/> E-4 | <input type="radio"/> E-7 | <input type="radio"/> O-1  | <input type="radio"/> O-2E | <input type="radio"/> O-4 |
| <input type="radio"/> E-2 | <input type="radio"/> E-5 | <input type="radio"/> E-8 | <input type="radio"/> O-1E | <input type="radio"/> O-3  | <input type="radio"/> O-5 |
| <input type="radio"/> E-3 | <input type="radio"/> E-6 | <input type="radio"/> E-9 | <input type="radio"/> O-2  | <input type="radio"/> O-3E | <input type="radio"/> O-6 |

115. How would you describe your overall work performance?

- ☐ poor
- ☐ below average
- ☐ average
- ☐ above average
- ☐ excellent

116. How would your supervisor describe your overall work performance?

- ☐ poor
- ☐ below average
- ☐ average
- ☐ above average
- ☐ excellent

117. Do you believe your promotion opportunities have been limited in the Air Force?

- ☐ Not limited at all
- ☐ Not limited
- ☐ Neither not limited nor limited
- ☐ Limited
- ☐ Limited to a great extent

118. How well do you agree with the statement: I am not getting ahead in the Air Force.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither disagree nor agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

### ***Reassurance of Anonymity***

***ALL ANSWERS ARE ANONYMOUS.*** No one other than the research team will see your completed questionnaire. Findings will be reported at the group level only. We asked for some demographic information in order to interpret results more accurately. Reports summarizing trends in large groups may be published.

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact the research team members listed on the front page of the questionnaire. We appreciate your participation and would be happy to address any questions you may have regarding the questionnaire or our research in general.

### **Feedback**

If you are interested in getting feedback on our research results, please provide us with the following personal information so we can reach you at a later date:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix B: Participant Letter of Instruction**



### **DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE AIR UNIVERSITY (AETC)**

Air Force Institute of Technology  
Department of Systems and Engineering Management  
2950 Hobson Way  
Wright-Patterson AFB OH 45433-7765

Dear Member of the 775th Civil Engineering Squadron:

Attached is a questionnaire which is part of a research study on why Air Force members stay in the military. In the past, individual decisions regarding staying or leaving a job have been explained by how satisfied a worker is with the job or how committed he or she is to the organization. We are interested in trying to explain decisions to stay or leave an organization with a concept called career plateauing. Career plateauing can be explained as when an individual reaches a point in his or her career where work has stabilized and likelihood of future promotions are low. The work is being conducted by the Department of Systems and Engineering Management at the Air Force Institute of Technology, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH..

The information gathered will only be used to help us better understand why people stay in the military. This research is not connected with any government inspection or audit. You are one of a small number of Air Force members selected to give their opinion on these matters. In order for the results to truly be representative, it is important that each questionnaire be completed and returned.

If there is a question on the questionnaire which you do not understand or do not wish to answer, please skip over it. Your responses to the questions will be completely confidential. No identifying information about you will be recorded anywhere on the questionnaire. No person outside of the research team will have access to the surveys or raw data. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way affect your relationship with your unit, the Air Force Institute of Technology, or the Department of Defense.

Please take the time to complete the attached survey and return it in the enclosed envelope to your collection point. If you are interested in getting feedback on our research results please fill out the last sheet of the survey with your name and address. Please make sure that all envelopes are sealed before they are turned into the collection point. If you miss the deadline for turning in the survey to the collection point or would prefer to send the survey directly back to us, please complete the survey and return it in the pre-addressed envelope through your base distribution. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the questionnaire or this research project. My contact information is as follows: Christine.rilovick@afit.edu COM (937)554-2064. My thesis advisor is Major Sharon Heilmann. She can be contacted at the following email addresses and telephone number: Sharon.heilmann@afit.edu; DSN: 785-3636, x4553. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

CHRISTINE Y. RILOVICK, Capt USAF  
Graduate Student, AFIT/ENV/GEM

## **Appendix C: Correlations Between Dependent and Independent Variables**

Variables	<i>n</i>	Mean	s.d.	Scale Ranges	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	182	2.75	1.05	1-5	1										
2	213	2.93	.76	1-7	.46**	1									
3	75	2.12	.33	1-3	.21	.19	1								
4	196	3.90	.62	1-6	-.23**	-.51**	.12	1							
5	218	4.76	.97	1-7	-.70**	-.52**	-.25*	.47**	1						
6	222	2.53	2.35	1-10	.43**	.33**	.17	-.38**	-.40**	1					
7	223	23.92	3.56		-.21**	-.01	-.10	-.47	.17*	.02	1				
8	223	1.13	.34		.03	.11	-.10	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.14*	1			
9	223	2.84	.75		.07	.10	-.14	-.03	-.03	.18**	.35**	.07	1		
10	222	.57	.93		-.18**	-.07	.08	-.12	.10	.06	.49**	-.14*	.14*	1	
11	221	35.62	27.40		-.19**	-.14*	-.21	.02	.03	-.24**	-.09	-.01	-.11	.03	1

<sup>a</sup>Pearson Two-tailed Coefficients

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

\*  $p < 0.05$

1. Intent to Leave

2. Career Plateau

3. Calculated Career Plateau

4. Job Satisfaction

5. Organizational Commitment

6. Job Search Behavior

7. Age

8. Gender, 1-Male 2-Female

9. Education, 1-GED, 2-High School, 3-Some College, 4-Associates Degree, 5-Bachelor Degree, 6-Graduate Degree, 7- Doctorate, 8-Post Doctorate, 9-Professional

10. Number of Dependents

11. Remaining Service Commitment in months

## References

- Abelson, M.A., & Baysinger, B.D., (1984). Optimal and dysfunctional turnover: Toward an organizational level model. *Academy of Management Review*, 9(000002), 331-341.
- Agho, A.O., Mueller, C.W., & Price, J.L. (1993). Determinants of employee job satisfaction: An empirical test of a causal model. *Human Relations*, 46(8), 1007-1028.
- Allen, T.D., Poteet, M. L., & Russell, J.E.A. (1998). Attitudes of managers who are more or less career plateaued. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 47(2), 159-171.
- Allen, T.D., Russell, J.E.A., Poteet, M.L., & Dobbins, G.H. (1999). Learning and development factors related to perceptions of job content and hierarchical plateauing. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 20(7), 1113.
- Bardwick, J.M. (1983). Plateauing and productivity. *Sloan Management Review*, 24(000003), 67-73.
- Bardwick, J.M. (1986). *The plateauing trap* (1st ed.). New York: American Management Association.
- Bardwick, J.M. (1987). How executives can help 'plateaued' employees. *Management Review*, 76(1), 40-46.
- Baron, R.M., & Kenny, D.A. (1986). The moderator-mediator distinction in social psychology research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.
- Bluedorn, A.C. (1982). A unified model of turnover from organizations. *Human Relations*, 35(2), 135-153.
- Chao, G.T. (1990). Exploration of the conceptualization and measurement of career plateau: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Management*, 16(1), 181-193.
- Choy, R.M., & Savery, L.K. (1998). Employee plateauing: some workplace attitudes. *Journal of Management Development*, 17(6), 392.
- Dalton, D.R., Todor, W.D., & Krackhardt, D.M. (1982). Turnover overstated: The functional taxonomy. *Academy of Management Review*, 7(000001), 117-123.
- Elsass, P.M., & Ralston, D.A. (1989). Individual responses to the stress of career plateauing. *Journal of Management*, 15(1), 35-47.

- Feldman, D.C., & Weitz, B.A. (1988). Career plateaus reconsidered. *Journal of Management*, 14(1), 69-80.
- Ference, T.P., Stoner, J.A.F., & Warren, E.K. (1977). Managing the career plateau. *Academy of Management Review*, 2(4), 602-612.
- Griffeth, R.W., Hom, P.W., & Gaertner, S. (2000). A meta-analysis of antecedents and correlates of employee turnover: Update, moderator tests, and research implications for the next millennium. *Journal of Management*, 26(3), 463-488.
- Griffeth, R.W., Steel, R.P., Allen, D.G., & Bryan, N. (2005). The development of a multidimensional measure of job market cognitions: The employment opportunity index (EOI). *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(2), 335-349.
- Hom, P.W., Griffeth, R.W., & Sellar L. (1984). The validity of mobley's (1977) model of employee turnover. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 34(2), 141-174.
- Kim, S.W., Price, J.L., Mueller, C.W., & Watson, T.W. (1996). The determinants of career intent among physicians at a U.S. air force hospital. *Human Relations*, 49(7), 947-976.
- Kopelman, R.E., Rovenpor, J.L., & Millsap, R.E. (1992). Rationale and construct validity evidence for the job search behavior index: Because intentions (and New Year's Resolutions) often come to naught. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 20(3), 269-287.
- Lee, P.C.B. (2003). Going beyond career plateau: Using professional plateau to account for work outcomes. *The Journal of Management Development*, 22(6), 538-551.
- Milliman, J.F.(1992). Causes, consequences, and moderating factors or career plateauing. University of Southern California.
- Mitchell, T.R., Holtom, B.C., Lee, T.W., Sablinski, C.J., & Erez, M. (2001). Why people stay: Using job embeddedness to predict voluntary turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(6), 1102-1121.
- Mobley, W.H. (1977). Intermediate linkages in the relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 62(2), 237-240.
- Motowidlo, S.J., & Lawton, G.W. (1984). Affective and cognitive factors in soldiers' reenlistment decisions. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(1), 157-166.
- Mowday, R.T., Steer, R.M. & Porter, L.W. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14, 224-247.

- Nachbagauer, A.G.M., & Riedl, G. (2002). Effects of concepts of career plateaus on performance, work satisfaction and commitment. *International Journal of Manpower*, 23(8), 716-733.
- Near, J.P. (1980). The career plateau: Causes and effects. *Business Horizons*, 23, 53-57.
- Near, J.P. (1984). Reactions to the career plateau. *Business Horizons*, 27(4), 75-79
- Near, J.P. (1985). A discriminate analysis of plateaued versus nonplateaued managers. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 26, 177-188.
- Nicholson, N. (1993). Purgatory or place of safety? The managerial plateau and organizational agegrading. *Human Relations*, 46(12), 1369-1389.
- Palich, L.E., Hom, P.W., & Griffeth, R.W. (1995). Managing in the international context: Testing cultural generality of sources of commitment to multinational enterprises. *Journal of Management*, 21(4), 671-691.
- Price, J.L. (1977). *The study of turnover*. Ames. IA: Iowa State University Press.
- Price, J.L. (2001). Reflection on the determinants of voluntary turnover. *International Journal of Manpower*, 22(7), 600-621.
- Price, J.L., & Mueller, C.W. (1981). A causal model of turnover for nurses. *Academy of Management Journal*, 24(3), 543-565.
- Rotondo, D. (1999). Individual-difference variables and career-related coping. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 139(4), 458.
- Sobel, M.E. (1982). Asymptotic confidence intervals for indirect effects in structural equation models. *Sociological Methodology*, 290-312.
- Spector, P.E. (1985). Measurement of human service staff satisfaction: Development of the job satisfaction survey. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 13(6), 693-713.
- Steel, R.P. (2002). Turnover theory at the empirical interface: Problems of fit and function. *Academy of Management Review*, 27(3), 346-360.
- Steel, R.P., & Ovalle, N.K. (1984). A review and meta-analysis of research on the relationship between behavioral intentions and employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(4), 673-686.

Tremblay, M., & Roger, A. (1993). Individual, familial, and organizational determinants of career plateau: An empirical study of the determinants of objective and subjective career plateau in a population of Canadian managers. *Group & Organization Management*, 18(4), 411-435.

Tremblay, M., Roger, A., & Toulouse, J.M. (1995). Career plateau and work attitudes: An empirical study of managers. *Human Relations*, 48(3), 221-237.

## **Vita**

Major Christine Y. Rilovick graduated from Carmel Mountain High School in San Diego, California, in May of 1990. She entered undergraduate studies at the United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering and earning her Air Force commission in June 1994.

Major Rilovick has served in the military as an Air Force civil engineering officer for ten years. Upon graduation, Major Rilovick will be assigned to Air Combat Command Headquarters, Langley Air Force Base, Hampton, Virginia.



REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 074-0188	
<p>The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of the collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.</p> <p><b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b></p>					
<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 12-09-2005		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Master's Thesis		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From – To)</b> Jun 2004 – June 2005	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Effects of Career Plateauing on Turnover: A Test of a Model				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Rilovick, Christine Y., Major, USAF				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAMES(S) AND ADDRESS(S)</b> Air Force Institute of Technology Graduate School of Engineering and Management (AFIT/EN) 2950 Hobson Way WPAFB OH 45433-7765				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>  AFIT/GEM/ENV/05J-01	
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED.					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> <p>The structure of most organizations dictates that only 1% of the employees will retire before they reach a career plateau. It is estimated that the number of people perceiving they are career plateaued will only increase in the future since more unusually well-qualified candidates will be competing for a diminishing number of positions. Given that an estimated 80% of the work conducted in organizations is performed by employees who are career plateaued, it would be beneficial to better understand if these plateaued individuals are likely to remain with the organization despite being plateaued. Therefore adding career plateauing to an existing turnover model could be beneficial in furthering our understanding of the turnover process.</p> <p>As such the primary purpose of this research was the introduction of the concept of career plateauing into an existing turnover model to investigate potential effects on turnover. Results from this study showed that perceptions of begin career plateaued did account for variance in turnover and the degree to which one believed himself to be plateaued was positively associated with one's intent to leave an organization.</p>					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Career Plateau, Job Turnover, Intent To Leave, Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction, Voluntary Turnover, Job Search, Job Alternatives					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION</b> OF: Unclassified			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  UU	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 72	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b> Sharon G. Heilmann, Maj, USAF (ENV)
<b>REPORT</b> U	<b>ABSTRACT</b> U	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> U			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)</b> (937) 255-3636, ext.4553 ; e-mail: sharon.heilmann@afit.edu