

“I Am Ready but Not Moving”

Olusola O. Oyeniya

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ABSTRACT

The phrase “I am ready but not moving” reflects a critical HR challenge where employees who possess the required skills, experience, and readiness for career growth remain immobile in their roles. This manuscript examines the HR dimensions of employee immobility, highlighting factors such as weak succession planning, opaque promotion systems, inconsistent performance management, favoritism, godfatherism, and underutilization of talent. By exploring the causes, consequences, and HR-driven solutions, this paper emphasizes the importance of merit-based systems, transparent processes, and talent development in fostering career mobility and organizational trust.

Keywords: Succession Planning, Human Resource Management, Promotion Systems, Talent Management, Employee Engagement, Organizational Culture, Performance Management, Mobility, Leadership Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Career growth is a cornerstone of employee motivation, retention, and performance. However, many employees report feeling prepared for advancement yet unable to move forward. This paradox, expressed as ‘I am ready but not moving,’ has become increasingly significant in modern organizations. From an HR perspective, stagnation is a structural challenge with implications for productivity, morale, and long-term sustainability. This introduction outlines the problem, highlights its HR relevance, and situates it within broader debates on employee engagement and organizational growth.

II. BACKGROUND OF LITERATURE

The issue of career stagnation has been extensively discussed within human resource and organizational behavior literature. Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1959) emphasizes that while extrinsic factors such as pay and working conditions may prevent dissatisfaction, intrinsic motivators like recognition and advancement drive

employee satisfaction and performance. Employees who are ‘ready but not moving’ often lack access to these intrinsic motivators.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) also provides insight: career growth relates directly to esteem and self-actualization needs. When organizations fail to provide upward mobility, employees experience unmet higher-level needs, leading to disengagement.

The Career Plateau Theory (Fence, Stoner, & Warren, 1977) specifically addresses situations where employees perceive limited opportunities for upward movement, resulting in reduced motivation and increased turnover intent. Additionally, Adams’ Equity Theory (1963) underlines the importance of fairness in promotion systems. Perceptions of favoritism or bias in promotion decisions intensify the feeling of being ‘stuck.’

Empirical studies (e.g., Ghosh et al., 2013; Allen & Katz, 1986) confirm that stagnation correlates with lower organizational commitment, reduced job satisfaction, and higher voluntary turnover rates. Within the HR discipline, succession planning, performance management, and talent development frameworks are proposed solutions to address these challenges.

Further contributions in HR literature demonstrate how stagnation impacts not only individual careers but also organizational outcomes. For example, Hall (1976) emphasized the concept of the ‘protean career,’ where individuals seek continuous growth and self-directed development. In organizations where promotion systems are rigid or opaque, employees with protean orientations often become dissatisfied. Similarly, Super’s Life-Span, Life-Space Theory (1980) illustrates how career development is an evolving process influenced by organizational opportunities; a lack of progression interrupts this trajectory and contributes to the plateau effect. Contemporary HR research also emphasizes the role of psychological contracts in employee mobility. Rousseau (1995) argued that when employees perceive broken promises such as

expectations of growth that never materialize they develop mistrust and disengagement. More recent studies (e.g., Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002) show that perceived violations of career-related psychological contracts increase turnover intentions.

Cross-cultural perspectives provide additional insights. In collectivist contexts, promotion delays may be tolerated due to respect for hierarchy, but in individualistic cultures employees are more likely to exit when growth is stalled. This suggests that HR must contextualize promotion and succession frameworks to cultural settings while maintaining fairness.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This manuscript adopts a qualitative, evidence-based approach by reviewing theoretical models and empirical studies in HRM. It synthesizes existing literature, HR frameworks, and case examples from both private and public sector organizations. The method is a structured literature review combined with HR practice analysis, focusing on the causes, effects, and HR interventions related to career stagnation.

In addition to secondary research, this manuscript draws from comparative case analyses of organizations across industries including finance, healthcare, and public administration. Sources include HR reports, CSR, organizational studies, and practitioner surveys. A thematic analysis was conducted on recurring HR practices that contribute to or mitigate career stagnation. This methodological triangulation enhances reliability by integrating theory, practice, and evidence.

IV. RESULTS

The review indicates five key HR-driven causes of the 'I am ready but not moving' phenomenon:

1. Ineffective succession planning, where organizations fail to establish pipelines for leadership.
2. Opaque and inconsistent promotion processes, fostering mistrust and perceptions of favoritism.
3. Weak performance management systems, overly reliant on tenure rather than competencies.
4. Gaps in talent management, including failure to identify and develop high-potential employees.
5. Cultural and behavioral challenges, such as leadership bias and nonchalant supervision.

Consequences include employee frustration, nonchalant behavior, increased turnover intentions, and erosion of trust in HR systems. At

the organizational level, stagnation leads to weaker succession pipelines, reduced innovation, and difficulties in sustaining competitiveness.

Additional findings highlight that stagnation disproportionately affects mid-level managers who are caught between operational delivery and strategic leadership. Research by Allen & Katz (1986) found that technical experts often experience plateauing when their specialized skills are not complemented with leadership development opportunities. Furthermore, organizations that lack mobility frameworks struggle to reallocate talent laterally, causing bottlenecks in career progression.

Case studies in multinational corporations show that transparent internal job postings and structured talent reviews significantly reduce perceptions of stagnation (Cappelli, 2008). In contrast, organizations with highly politicized HR systems demonstrate higher rates of voluntary turnover and talent drain.

V. DISCUSSION

From an HR standpoint, addressing career stagnation requires systemic reforms. Succession planning must be institutionalized, ensuring that employees with potential are prepared for advancement. Transparent promotion frameworks are vital to restore trust, requiring competency-based systems that align career growth with organizational strategy. Performance management should be evidence-driven, incorporating 360-degree feedback and measurable outputs rather than tenure or personal biases.

Employee empowerment through mentoring, strategic training, coaching, and internal mobility platforms plays a critical role in reducing stagnation. Furthermore, HR must act as the custodian of fairness by ensuring accountability in talent decisions. These approaches align with global best practices in human capital management and support sustainable employee engagement.

Comparative analysis with international organizations demonstrates that firms with strong succession systems and clear career pathways report higher engagement, lower turnover, and improved organizational outcomes (Cappelli, 2008). Thus, implementing evidence-based HR interventions can transform the employee experience from stagnation to progression.

A key dimension of this discussion involves the balance between internal promotions and external recruitment. While external hiring may introduce new perspectives, over-reliance

undermines internal employee morale. HR must therefore strike a balance by integrating internal succession with selective external hiring. Equity Theory further suggests that visible fairness in these decisions is crucial for sustaining trust.

Another critical HR implication concerns diversity and inclusion. Women and minority employees often report higher levels of stagnation due to systemic barriers in promotion pipelines (Catalyst, 2020). Thus, Management, HR must incorporate inclusive talent practices to ensure equitable mobility. This includes bias training for managers, transparent promotion panels, and sponsorship programs.

VI. CONCLUSION

The expression 'I am ready but not moving' captures the silent frustration of employees facing career stagnation. In this sense, it refers to a situation where employees who have reached professional readiness for higher responsibilities, positions are denied advancement due to external influence rather than merit. Instead of expertise, experience, or performance being recognized, connections and godfatherism dictate who reaches the peak of the career ladder. Experts remain frozen at mid-level or technical roles, while less competent but politically connected employees are elevated. This creates a career plateau by design. Employees are ready but not moving because influence replaces meritocracy in succession and promotion decisions. This paper demonstrates that the issue is not one of employee readiness but rather a systemic barrier where organizational politics, favoritism, and godfatherism restrict advancement. The issue lies in the system, not the individual where influence replaces expertise, and career progression becomes dependent on patronage rather than performance.

For HR, the challenge is to design transparent, fair, and competency-driven systems that align organizational needs with employee aspirations. By doing so, organizations create environments where readiness is matched with opportunity, driving both individual fulfillment and organizational performance.

The expanded analysis underscores that career stagnation is both an HR systems challenge and a cultural issue. Sustainable solutions demand integration of succession planning, competency-based performance management, diversity initiatives, and digital tools. By addressing these holistically, HR can transform the narrative from stagnation to career agility, ensuring that

employees who are ready indeed have opportunities to move.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in the development of this manuscript.

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