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The Influence of Career Plateau on Knowledge Hiding of Knowledge Workers

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ABSTRACT

This study takes the cognitive-affective system theory of personality as the whole logic, integrates resource preservation theory and cooperation and competition theory to investigate the influence mechanism of Career Plateau on knowledge workers' knowledge hiding. The results show that career plateau (including its three dimensions: hierarchical plateau, work content plateau and inclusive plateau) has a significant positive impact on status anxiety and knowledge hiding of knowledge workers, and status anxiety plays a complete mediating effect between career plateau (including hierarchical plateau, work content plateau and inclusive plateau) and knowledge hiding of knowledge workers. Cooperative goal dependence positively moderates the relationship between hierarchical plateau and status anxiety, and negatively regulates the relationship between work content plateau and status anxiety. In addition, cooperative goal dependence positively moderates the indirect effect of hierarchical plateau on the knowledge workers' knowledge hiding through status anxiety, and negatively moderates the indirect effect of work content plateau on the knowledge workers' knowledge hiding through status anxiety. The results of this paper provide theoretical support and management enlightenment for further exploring the mechanism of career plateau and knowledge hiding in Chinese enterprises.

1. Introduction

When career plateau and boundless career are widely accepted in western countries, career plateau has become a challenge in China and other emerging markets^[1]. In China, due to the popularity of higher education and the greater mobility of the labor market, the supply of qualified labor is relatively sufficient, including many high-quality talents such as masters and doctors. At the same time, in order to cope with the market competition, domestic enterprises should streamline their organiza-

tions and reduce their levels to maintain flexibility, which means that candidates for positions in organizations must compete fiercely for limited senior positions and stay in the same position for a long time. Because Chinese society is famous for its high power distance and differential communication, knowledge-based employees in Chinese enterprises may face not only hierarchical career plateau and job content career plateau^[2], but also centralized or inclusive career plateau^[3], this makes the career plateau have a negative impact on knowledge workers' work attitude (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational emotional com-

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mitment)^{[1][4]}, behavior (e.g., on-the-job behavior)^[5] and performance^[6].

In order to make the organization successful and competitive, the organization hopes knowledge workers to share knowledge and makes a lot of efforts to promote knowledge sharing among employees. However, the success of such efforts depends on the willingness and intention of knowledge workers to share knowledge and various events in the organization. Knowledge is one of the important assets that knowledge workers use to improve their position in the organization. Many knowledge workers are more willing to hide knowledge, improve their importance and make them indispensable. Because the organization does not “own” the knowledge assets of employees, knowledge hiding has a serious impact on the organization, the relationship between employees and individuals. It leads to the decrease of creativity^[7] and personal performance^[8], interpersonal distrust^[9] and the deterioration of interpersonal relationship^[10]. Existing studies have explored the influencing factors of knowledge hiding from the perspectives of knowledge characteristics, individuals, teams and organizations^[11], but few studies have explored the influence of individual career development on knowledge concealment. It is common in many organizations that most employees reach a career plateau before reaching their career goals. In the limited study, Yang et al^[12] discussed the direct effect of the career plateau of knowledge employees on knowledge rent-seeking behavior, but it is not known whether the career plateau of knowledge employees and negative knowledge behavior such as knowledge hiding behavior are affected by mediating variables and moderating variables, which undoubtedly weakens the practical guidance.

In order to explore the influence of career plateau on knowledge hiding of knowledge workers, this study takes the cognitive-affective system theory of personality as the whole logic, integrates resource preservation theory and cooperation and competition theory, constructs a mediating model of career plateau on knowledge hiding through status anxiety, and explores the moderating role of cooperative goal dependence in the model (see Figure 1). The results of this study will provide theoretical support and management enlightenment for exploring the action mechanism of career plateau and the generation mechanism of knowledge hiding in Chinese enterprises.

First of all, the cognitive-affective system theory of personality^[13] holds that the final individual behavior depends not only on the situation, but also on the organization of the activated cognitive and affective network. The concept of career plateau emphasizes individual perception^[14]. In addition to testing the direct impact of career

plateau on knowledge hiding of knowledge workers, this study also introduces emotional variable to construct the mediating path between career plateau and knowledge hiding of knowledge workers based on the logic of “situation-cognition-emotion-behavior”. Career plateau is a stressful career experience^[15], which easily leads to status anxiety^[16]. Status anxiety reflects the damaged state of the stock of individual positive psychological resources^[17], according to the resource preservation theory^[17], employees will hide knowledge to protect their own resources. Therefore, this study examines the mediating role of status anxiety between career plateau and knowledge hiding of knowledge workers.

Secondly, according to the theory of cooperation and competition, people’s beliefs about goal dependence affect the dynamics and results of interaction^[18]. When cooperative goals depend on each other, people solve problems involving common interests by promoting common goals, integrating ideas and sharing rewards, which may reduce knowledge hiding behavior. In addition, the basic psychological process of cooperative goal dependence may affect the effect of career plateau on knowledge hiding of knowledge workers through the logic of “situation-cognition-emotion-behavior”. Therefore, cooperative goal dependence may be an important boundary condition for career plateau on affect knowledge hiding of knowledge workers through status anxiety, this study will test the moderating effect of cooperative goal dependence.

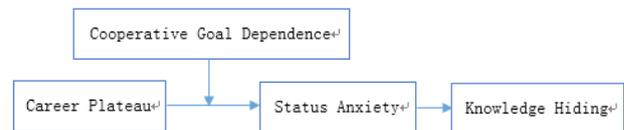


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypothesis

2.1 Career Plateau and Knowledge Hiding of Knowledge Workers

Following Bardwick^[2], existing studies generally treat career plateau as two dimensions: hierarchical plateau and job content plateau. Hierarchical plateau is defined as a state in which employees are unlikely to be promoted in the future in their career^[19]. When the work has been mastered and the work is no longer challenging, the plateau of work content will occur^[2]. Combined with Schein’s^[20] three-dimensional model, Xie et al.^[3] believed that besides the hierarchical plateau and work content plateau, the stagnation of organizational centralization (inclusive plateau) is another dimension of career plateau, and inclusive pla-

teau refers to a state in which the possibility of obtaining a central position in employees' career stagnates. The key to defining career plateau is the individual's perceptions of his career future^[14]. Shon^[21] put forward the concept of perceived career plateau. Therefore, this study adopts the concept of subjective career plateau and believes that career plateau includes three dimensions: hierarchical plateau, job content plateau and inclusive plateau^[3].

Knowledge hiding is defined as "an individual intentionally retains or conceals the knowledge required by others"^[9], which is mainly a negative work behavior^[10]. Knowledge hiding can not be simply expressed as the lack of knowledge sharing, because knowledge hiders intentionally retain knowledge. Employees who fail to share knowledge may not be aware that their colleagues are seeking knowledge, or they may not know the required information at all^[9]. Therefore, knowledge hiding constitutes a reactive behavior (that is, it is a response to knowledge requests).

The flattening of the organizational structure reduces the promotion space of employees, intensifies the hierarchical plateau phenomenon of employees, and in turn affects employees' sense of belonging to the organization^[22]. The breaking of long-term employment mode and the lack of challenge and small learning opportunities under the plateau of work content will reduce the employability and job satisfaction of employees^[4]. According to Schein^[20], centralization refers to the degree to which employees are more or less "inside" in an organization. When employees have access to more important and sensitive information, greater power and authority, and greater decision-making power, they will be regarded as the center of the organization. Chinese society is famous for its high power distance and differential communication. Knowledge workers in an inclusive career plateau perceive the differential atmosphere in the workplace, which will reduce the organizational affective commitment^[23]. According to the resource conservation theory^[17], individual resources include material resources (such as houses), conditional resources (such as qualifications), personal trait resources (such as self-esteem) and energy (such as knowledge). Whether it is organizational belonging, organizational affective commitment or job satisfaction, it reflects the basic psychological needs of individuals and belongs to personal trait resources. Lower employability means less conditional resources, and small learning opportunities will threaten the value of energy resources. Because the career plateau brings loss and threat to the individual's condition resources, personal trait resources and energy resources, when facing the pressure of resource loss and threat, the theoretical model of resource conservation pre-

dicts that individuals will strive to minimize the net loss of resources. Therefore, when colleagues seek knowledge, knowledge workers may hide their knowledge in order to save their limited energy resources. In addition, social exchange theory holds that, in essence, organizations and employees are part of the social exchange relationship. Employees agree to provide time and energy for the organization in return for compensation, job security and career development. Employees who are in the state of career plateau are prone to the psychological imbalance of exchange relationship^[1]. When the work contribution lacks equal return, people will develop knowledge ownership and hide knowledge^[24]. Intensifying competition is one of the reasons for career plateau. According to social comparison theory, Career plateau employees who tend to compete with colleagues are more likely to hide their knowledge when they face their colleagues' knowledge requests^[25]. Therefore, this study infers that career plateau has a positive impact on knowledge hiding. Yang et al.^[12] verified the direct effect of knowledge workers' career plateau (hierarchical plateau and work content plateau) on knowledge monopoly behavior. As for the inclusive plateau, this study also infers that it has a positive impact on knowledge hiding. When employees facing the inclusive plateau recognize that knowledge is the source of power, they will hide knowledge for political or competitive purposes^[9]. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H1: Career plateau has a positive effect on knowledge hiding.

H1a: Hierarchical plateau has a positive effect on knowledge hiding.

H1b: Work content plateau has a positive effect on knowledge hiding.

H1c: Inclusive plateau has a positive effect on knowledge hiding.

2.2 Mediating Role of Status Anxiety

Status refers to the position of a group or individual relative to other groups or individuals in a social hierarchy^[26]. Anxiety refers to a subjective emotional state with inner anxiety, and in a more extreme state, it is a sense of fear or panic^[27]. Thus, status anxiety describes a worry about position or value in a hierarchy. de Bottom^[28] believes that status anxiety is "a worry that we may not conform to the ideal of success established by society and may be deprived of dignity and respect; a worry that the status we currently occupy is too low or will fall to a lower level". Status, whether it is lost or not in line with the wishes of individuals, will produce anxiety^[29].

There is an implicit assumption in the literature of career plateau that career plateau is a stressful career expe-

rience. Ference et al. ^[19] pointed out that managers in the career plateau state are usually referred to as “stranded”, “dead forest” and “dead wood”. Feldman and Weitz ^[30] found that many employees’ reaction to career plateau is “resignation, cynicism and indifference”. McCleese et al. ^[31] found that career plateau is a stressful career experience. Stress is a subset of emotion ^[16]. According to the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion ^[16], an emotion is not only caused by the needs, constraints or resources of the environment, but also by their juxtaposition with a person’s motivation and belief. By pointing out the importance of what happened to a person’s well-being, the evaluation process negotiates and integrates these two groups of variables. It is an extension of the cognitive mediating principle in the theory of psychological stress, that is, it is not only the environmental “stressor” but also the meaning that is evaluated by the sufferer that causes the stress response. Smith-Ruig ^[32] found that an individual’s attitude towards career plateau depends on how an individual defines career and success, which may be related to the objective definition of success (i.e. hierarchical promotion) or the individual’s desire for continuous skill development and spiritual motivation (subjective career success). Therefore, hierarchical career plateau is related to the objective definition of success, while work content plateau and inclusive plateau are related to the subjective definition of success ^[32]. Whether it is hierarchical career plateau, work content plateau or inclusive career plateau, they all depict the status state of seeking but not, being afraid of losing and seeking recognition from others ^[33], which is easy to produce uncertainty of career development, sense of threat and frustration, and then cause status anxiety ^[16]. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H2: Career plateau has a positive effect on status anxiety.

H2a: Hierarchical plateau has a positive effect on status anxiety.

H2b: Work content plateau has a positive effect on status anxiety.

H2c: Inclusive plateau has a positive effect on status anxiety.

Anxiety is an emotional state. In addition to emotional reactions, anxiety is also related to unpleasant cognitive and physiological aspects, such as the arousal of the nervous system (such as tension or chest tightness). This kind of situation and internal stimulation are expressed in the form of thoughts and ideas that are dangerous to individuals ^[34]. These types of thoughts may be disproportionate to threats because they are subjective ^[35]. A series of symptoms and disorders relating to anxiety include headache, eating disorders, drug and alcohol consumption/ abuse,

breakdown of family and social relationships, decreased immunity, severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder ^[36]. Status anxiety, as a negative emotion ^[16], belongs to the category of personal trait resources, which is reflected in the reduction or threat of the stock of positive psychological resources. When facing the pressure of resource loss and threat, the resource conservation theory model predicts that individuals tend to take actions to prevent resource loss. At the same time, anxiety is also related to unpleasant cognitive and physiological aspects, which can be expressed in the form of dangerous thoughts and thoughts for individuals. When individuals in a state of status anxiety face colleagues’ knowledge requests, they will limit the instantaneous thinking and action system, weaken the freedom of thinking and action ^[37] and hide knowledge, regardless of the possible deterioration of interpersonal relationships ^[9]. Knowledge hiding behavior may help gain control over knowledge and influence on the organization. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H3: Status anxiety has a positive effect on knowledge hiding.

According to the cognitive-affective system theory of personality ^[13], the situation activates a series of individual internal reactions, which are not only cognitive but also affective. The cognitive and affective units are not unconnected and isolated reaction units, but interact and influence each other dynamically. It is a unique network formed by the organization of their relationship that guides and restricts the activation of specific cognition, emotion and potential behavior. Therefore, under the influence of the cognitive-emotional system of personality, knowledge workers perceive that they are in the state of career plateau in the organization, and make negative evaluation on their career development and career success, engender uncertainty of career development, sense of threat and frustration, and then lead to status anxiety. When individuals experience the decrease or threat of positive psychological resources, they tend to take actions to prevent the loss of limited resources. Anxiety is not only an emotional state, but also related to unpleasant cognitive and physiological aspects. It can be expressed in the form of dangerous thoughts and ideas to individuals. Therefore, individuals in status anxiety may hide knowledge from knowledge requesters regardless of the consequences of deterioration of interpersonal relationship. That is to say, according to the cognitive-affective system theory of personality, career plateau (perception of negative events) makes knowledge workers produce status anxiety (emotion), and choose knowledge hiding (behavior) when facing the knowledge request of colleagues. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H4: Status anxiety plays a mediating role between career plateau and knowledge hiding.

H4a: Status anxiety plays a mediating role between hierarchical plateau and knowledge hiding.

H4b: Status anxiety plays a mediating role between work content plateau and knowledge hiding.

H4c: Status anxiety plays a mediating role between inclusive plateau and knowledge hiding.

2.3 The Moderating Effect of Cooperative Goal Dependence

Goal interdependence refers to the subjective evaluation made by group members on the relationship between each other's goals^[38]. It will affect interpersonal trust, performance, innovation and resource exchange^[38]. The theory of cooperation and competition believes that in the interdependence of cooperative goals, the goals are considered to be positively related. When one person is moving towards achieving his own goal, others are also moving towards achieving their goal. By believing that their goals are consistent, people expect them to be interdependent, because it's good for everyone to help each other act effectively. Therefore, they have established a relationship of mutual trust and mutual help, and they are confident that they can work together^[39].

According to the cognitive-emotional system theory of personality^[13], by influencing the coding of situational stimuli, or by focusing on selected mental representations, it can promote the change from "hot processing system focusing on emotion" to "cold processing system focusing on cognition". Because the hot processing system triggers impulsive response, while the cold processing system triggers rational behavioral response, this change can inhibit the problematic emotion, cognition and behavior, as well as the dynamics related to situational stimuli. Behavioral substitutability, emotional concentration and cognitive inducibility are the key elements to explain the basic psychological process of goal interdependence^[40]. When the knowledge workers in the career plateau state are dependent on the cooperative goals, because of the good substitutability, the high emotional concentration and the strong cognitive inducement of the cooperative goal dependent behavior, this interdependence based on information, emotion and behavior can promote the individuals facing the plateau state to change from "hot processing system focusing on emotion" to "cold processing system focusing on cognition", realize the self-regulation of cognition, emotion and behavior, and then help to reduce the uncertainty of career development, the sense of threat and frustration, alleviate the status anxiety. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H5: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the relationship between career plateau and status anxiety.

H5a: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the relationship between hierarchical plateau and status anxiety.

H5b: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the relationship between work content plateau and status anxiety.

H5c: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the relationship between inclusive plateau and status anxiety.

In conclusion, this study further proposes a moderating mediating model, that is, cooperative goal dependence may also moderate the indirect effect of career plateau on knowledge hiding behavior through status anxiety. Status anxiety plays a mediating role in the influence of career plateau on knowledge hiding, and the mediating effect is influenced by the dependence of cooperative goals. When the cooperative goal dependence is relatively high, the indirect effect of career plateau on knowledge hiding through status anxiety is relatively small. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H6: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the mediating role of status anxiety between career plateau and knowledge hiding.

H6a: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the mediating role of status anxiety between hierarchical plateau and knowledge hiding.

H6b: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the mediating role of status anxiety between work content plateau and knowledge hiding.

H6c: Cooperative goal dependence negatively moderates the mediating role of status anxiety between inclusive plateau and knowledge hiding.

3. Research Method

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

From May 2020 to September 2020, this study used a questionnaire survey method to complete data collection in three times. The first survey mainly collected the data of enterprise characteristics (such as enterprise scale, etc.), participant characteristics (gender, age, etc.) and career plateau; the second survey (2 months later) paired collected the data of status anxiety and cooperative goal dependence; the third survey (2 months later) paired collected the data of knowledge hiding. The survey sample is 15 enterprises' knowledge employees located in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai in China, involving culture, sports and entertainment, real estate, machinery manufacturing and other industries, including 3 state-owned enterprises, 9

private enterprises and 3 Foreign-funded enterprises. With the assistance of the human resources department and the consent of the knowledge workers to be investigated, the data collection was completed through on-site distribution and collection of questionnaires. The data collection process is strictly confidential to avoid being contacted by other colleagues.

A total of 471 questionnaires were distributed in this survey. After eliminating the invalid questionnaires, the final number of valid questionnaires was 328, and the effective recovery rate was 69.63%. The data of sample structure shows that: 57.93% of the subjects are female; 51.22% of the subjects are 26-35 years old and 27.44% of the subjects are 36-45 years old, 14.63% of the subjects are under 25 years old and 6.71% of the subjects are above 46 years old; 56.71% of the subjects are bachelor's degree and 19.51% of the subjects are master's degree, 21.95% of the subjects are college degree and 1.83% of the subjects are doctor's degree; among them, 29.88% have worked for less than one year, 38.41% have worked for 4-6 years, 16.46% have worked for 7-10 years, 8.54% have worked for 11-15 years, 6.71% have worked for more than 16 years; grassroots employees accounted for 42.68%, grassroots managers accounted for 24.39%, middle managers accounted for 24.39%, top managers or one of the owners accounted for 8.54%; employees of state-owned enterprises accounted for 25.00%, employees of private enterprises accounted for 50.61%, and employees of foreign-funded enterprises accounted for 24.39%.

3.2 Variable Measurement

This study uses mature and authoritative scales at home and abroad to measure variables. In order to avoid the middle effect (i.e. choosing the middle point) when the subjects answer the questions ^[41], the scale adopts Likert 6-level scoring method, 1 is "very disagree", 3 is "relatively disagree", 4 is "relatively agree", 6 is "very agree".

Career plateau was measured by the scale developed by Xie et al. ^[3], including 16 items such as "my present job can further enrich my work skills". Knowledge hiding is measured by the scale developed by Peng ^[42], including three items such as "I will not transform my knowledge and experience into the knowledge and experience of the organization". Based on the STAI and referring to the research of Wang and Zhu ^[33], the measurement of status anxiety includes four items such as "I am so depressed about my current social status in the work unit that I can't exclude them from my mind". Cooperative goal dependence was measured by the scale developed by Alper et al. ^[39], including five items such as "my colleagues' goal achievement contributes to my success".

Previous studies have shown that employee's subjective characteristics and organizational environment are important factors affecting employee's knowledge hiding ^[9]. Demographic variables and job characteristics can affect career plateau and related outcome variables ^[43]. Therefore, this study takes six categorical variables of employee's gender, age, education, working years, position level and enterprise nature as the main control variables.

4. Research Results

4.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis and Homologous Error Test

Table 1. Results of Reliability and Validity Analysis

Latent Variable	Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α
Career Plateau (CP)	CP1	0.812	0.891	0.544	0.916
	CP2	0.746			
	CP3	0.728			
	CP4	0.771			
	CP5	0.786			
	CP6	0.769			
	CP7	0.842			
	CP8	0.874			
	CP9	0.865			
	CP10	0.780			
	CP11	0.793			
	CP12	0.850			
	CP13	0.831			
	CP14	0.840			
	CP15	0.878			
	CP16	0.868			
Status Anxiety (SA)	SA1	0.820	0.873	0.637	0.869
	SA2	0.682			
	SA3	0.760			
	SA4	0.896			
Knowledge Hiding(KH)	KH1	0.928	0.921	0.795	0.921
	KH2	0.875			
	KH3	0.873			
Cooperative Goal Dependence (CGP)	CGI1	0.742	0.847	0.532	0.820
	CGI2	0.787			
	CGI3	0.807			
	CGI4	0.781			
	CGI5	0.721			

Before the hypothesis is verified, the reliability and validity of each variable are tested. The results are shown in Table 1. It can be seen from the data in Table 1 that the Cronbach's α of the four variables are all above 0.80, indicating that the reliability of each scale is high. The CR value of each variable is greater than 0.8, AVE is greater than 0.5, and the square root of AVE is greater than the direct correlation coefficient of each variable (see Table 2), indicating that the scales have good convergent validity and discriminant validity.

The measurement of all variables are from the same subject, which is easy to cause homology error, and may affect the research results. Therefore, this study uses the Harman one-way test to check the size of homology error. The results of Harman one-way test show that the variance explanation rate of the first common factor obtained without rotation is 28.243%, the total variance explanation rate of all factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 is 69.640%, and the variance explanation rate of the first common factor is not more than 50%, and it is not more than half of the total variance explanation amount. The results show that the homologous errors exist but are not serious.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the variables are shown in Table 2. It can be seen from Table 2 that there is a significant positive correlation between career plateau and knowledge hiding ($r=0.283, P < 0.01$), and H1 has been preliminarily verified. Career plateau was positively correlated with status anxiety ($r=0.390, P < 0.01$), and negatively correlated with cooperative goal dependence ($r=-0.542, P < 0.01$). Status anxiety was positively correlated with knowledge hiding ($r=0.513, p < 0.01$), and negatively correlated with cooperative goal dependence

($r= -0.202, P < 0.01$).

4.3 Hypothesis Test

4.3.1 Direct Effect and Mediation Effect Test

In this study, hierarchical regression and bootstrap analysis were used to test the direct effect and mediating effect. Firstly, from model 1-1 in Table 3-1, model 1-2 in Table 3-2, model 1-3 in Table 3-3 and model 1-4 in Table 3-4, it can be seen that career plateau ($\beta=0.360, P < 0.001$), hierarchical plateau ($\beta =0.239, P < 0.01$), work content plateau ($\beta=0.267, P < 0.01$) and inclusive plateau ($\beta=0.218, P < 0.001$) have significant positive effects on knowledge hiding. Hypothesis 1, 1a, 1b and 1C are all valid.

From model 4-1 in Table 3-1, model 4-2 in Table 3-2, model 4-3 in Table 3-3, and model 4-4 in Table 3-4, career plateau ($\beta=0.485, p < 0.001$), hierarchical plateau ($\beta=0.457, p < 0.001$), work content plateau ($\beta=0.353, p < 0.001$), inclusive plateau ($\beta=0.224, p < 0.01$) have significant positive effects on status anxiety. Hypothesis 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c are all valid.

From model 2-1 in Table 3-1, model 2-2 in Table 3-2, model 2-3 in Table 3-3, and model 2-4 in Table 3-4, status anxiety ($\beta=0.521, p < 0.001$) has a significant positive impact on knowledge hiding, hypothesis 3 holds.

From the models 1-1, 2-1 and 3-1 in Table 3-1, it can be seen that after adding status anxiety into the model, status anxiety ($\beta=0.485, P < 0.001$) has a significant positive effect on knowledge hiding, and career plateau ($\beta=0.125, ns$) has no significant effect on knowledge hiding. It can be proved that status anxiety has a complete mediating effect between career plateau and knowledge hiding. Hypothesis 4 holds. Similarly, suppose 4a, 4b, 4C are all true.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistical Results and Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Mean Value	SD	Career Plateau	Status Anxiety	Cooperative Goal Dependence	Knowledge Hiding
Career Plateau	3.04	0.74	(0.738)			
Status Anxiety	2.82	0.63	0.390**	(0.798)		
Cooperative Goal Dependence	3.22	0.74	-0.542**	-0.202**	(0.729)	
Knowledge Hiding	2.42	0.59	0.283**	0.513**	-0.337**	(0.892)

Note. ***, **, * respectively indicated significant correlation at 0.001, 0.01 and 0.05 levels (bilateral). The same is below. The values in brackets in the table are the square root of AVE of each variable.

Table 3-1. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis I

Variable	Knowledge Hiding			Status Anxiety		
	Model 1-1	Model 2-1	Model 3-1	Model 4-1	Model 5-1	Model 6-1
Gender	0.025	-0.037	-0.036	0.125	0.127	0.133
Age	-0.086	-0.115	-0.112	0.053	0.050	0.062
Education	0.104	0.135	0.133	-0.060	-0.059	-0.055
Working Years	0.024	0.031	0.025	-0.003	-0.002	-0.016
Position Level	-0.013	-0.021	-0.003	-0.027	-0.026	-0.016
Enterprise Nature	-0.097	-0.063	-0.067	-0.062	-0.062	-0.063
Career Plateau	0.360***		0.125	0.485***	0.463***	0.447
Status Anxiety		0.521***	0.485***			
Cooperative Goal Dependence					-0.101	-0.077
Career Plateau* Cooperative Goal Dependence						0.115
R2	0.108	0.256	0.293	0.166	0.174	0.185
ΔR2	—	—	0.037	—	0.008	0.011
F	2.666**	8.797***	7.921***	4.405***	3.831***	3.572**

Table 3-2. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis II

Variable	Knowledge Hiding			Status Anxiety		
	Model 1-2	Model 2-2	Model 3-2	Model 4-2	Model 5-2	Model 6-2
Gender	0.036	-0.037	-0.037	0.141	0.122	0.118
Age	-0.098	-0.115	-0.115	0.033	0.055	0.080
Education	0.090	0.135	0.135	-0.086	-0.091	-0.087
Working Years	0.023	0.031	0.031	-0.015	-0.027	-0.039
Position Level	-0.041	-0.021	-0.021	-0.038	-0.037	-0.031
Enterprise Nature	-0.103	-0.063	-0.063	-0.077	-0.076	-0.071
Hierarchical Plateau	0.239**		0.007	0.457***	0.429*	0.397
Status Anxiety		0.521***	0.503***			
Cooperative Goal Dependence					-0.111	-0.090
Hierarchical Plateau* Cooperative Goal Dependence						0.183**
R2	0.077	0.256	0.286	0.187	0.194	0.209
ΔR2	—	—	0.030	—	0.007	0.015
F	1.841**	8.797***	7.643***	5.087***	4.617***	4.465***

Table 3-3. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis III

Variable	Knowledge Hiding			Status Anxiety		
	Model 1-3	Model 2-3	Model 3-3	Model 4-3	Model 5-3	Model 6-3
Gender	0.021	-0.037	-0.038	0.120	0.114	0.117
Age	-0.080	-0.115	-0.110	0.061	0.068	0.067
Education	0.097	0.135	0.131	-0.070	-0.072	-0.070
Working Years	0.048	0.031	0.034	-0.029	-0.023	-0.019
Position Level	-0.082	-0.021	-0.023	-0.121	-0.118	-0.111
Enterprise Nature	-0.088	-0.063	-0.063	-0.050	-0.050	-0.052
Work Content Plateau	0.267**		0.094	0.353***	0.336***	0.339
Status Anxiety		0.521***	0.490**			
Cooperative Goal Dependence					-0.041	-0.032
Work Content Plateau* Cooperative Goal Dependence						-0.049**
R2	0.097	0.256	0.292	0.138	0.149	0.158
ΔR2	—	—	0.036	—	0.011	0.009
F	2.357**	8.797***	7.897***	3.688***	3.225***	2.879***

Table 3-4. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis IV

Variable	Knowledge Hiding			Status Anxiety		
	Model 1-4	Model 2-4	Model 3-4	Model 4-4	Model 5-4	Model 6-4
Gender	0.030	-0.037	-0.037	0.134	0.109	0.110
Age	-0.089	-0.115	-0.113	0.048	0.076	0.079
Education	0.116	0.135	0.140	-0.049	-0.062	-0.060
Working Years	0.019	0.031	0.020	-0.002	-0.016	-0.018
Position Level	-0.001	-0.021	-0.019	-0.036	-0.050	-0.048
Enterprise Nature	-0.096	-0.063	-0.066	-0.060	-0.059	-0.060
Inclusive Plateau	0.218***		0.106	0.224**	0.165*	0.153
Status Anxiety		0.521***	0.499***			
Cooperative Goal Dependence					-0.153	-0.138
Inclusive Plateau* Cooperative Goal Dependence						0.024
R2	0.077	0.256	0.294	0.074	0.085	0.092
ΔR2	—	—	0.038	—	0.011	0.007
F	1.838**	8.797***	7.982***	1.777**	1.785**	1.587**

Table 4. Bootstrap Analysis Results of Mediating Effect

Independent Variable	The Effect on Knowledge Hiding	Effect Value	SE	Bootstrap95% CI
Career Plateau	Direct Effect	0.127	0.096	[-0.0618,0.3124]
	Indirect Effect	0.241**	0.056	[0.1355,0.3584]
Hierarchical Plateau	Direct Effect	0.003	0.086	[-0.1665,0.1721]
	Indirect Effect	0.238**	0.057	[0.1353,0.3588]
Work Content Plateau	Direct Effect	0.097	0.077	[-0.0562,0.2492]
	Indirect Effect	0.178**	0.044	[0.0961,0.2661]
Inclusive Plateau	Direct Effect	0.101	0.070	[-0.0371,0.2382]
	Indirect Effect	0.120**	0.041	[0.0428,0.02018]

This study uses bootstrap analysis in process macro to further test the mediating effect of status anxiety. When the sample size was set to 5000, bootstrap analysis showed that the confidence interval of the mediating effect of status anxiety at 95% confidence level did not contain 0, which further verified Hypothesis 4, 4a, 4b and 4C, and the confidence interval of four groups of direct effects at 95% confidence level all contained 0. Therefore, status anxiety played a full mediating role. See Table 4 for details.

4.3.2 Moderating Effect Test

From model 6-1 in Table 3-1 and model 6-4 in Table 3-4, the interaction item has a positive effect on status anxiety, but it is not significant ($\beta= 0.115$, NS; $\beta=0.024$, NS). Hypothesis 5 and 5C are not valid.

According to model 6-2 in Table 3-2, interaction item has a significant positive impact on status anxiety ($\beta=0.183$, $P < 0.01$); according to model 6-3 in Table 3-3, interaction item has a significant negative impact on status anxiety ($\beta=-0.049$, $P < 0.01$). As shown in Figure 2 and 3 below, hypothesis 5a does not hold and hypothesis 5b holds.

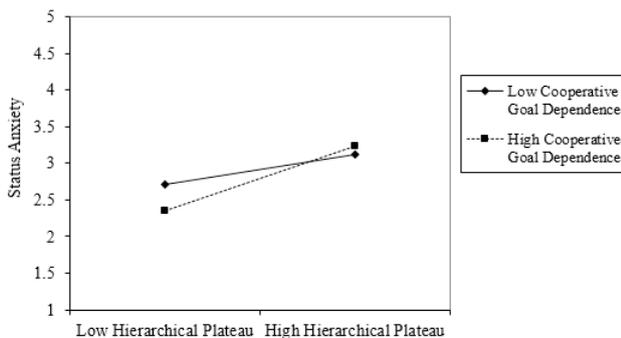


Figure 2. The Moderating Effect of Cooperative Goal Dependence on the Relationship Between Hierarchical Plateau and Status Anxiety

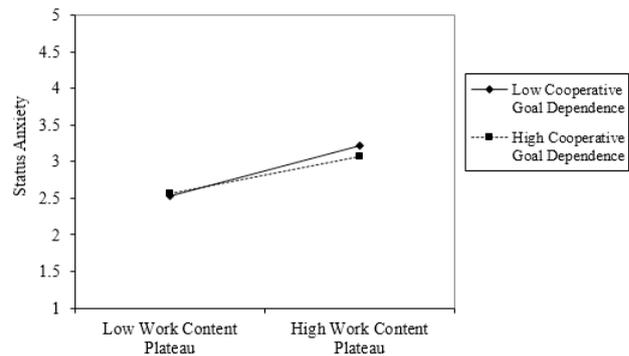


Figure 3. The Moderating Effect of Cooperative Goal Dependence on the Relationship Between Work Content Plateau and Status Anxiety

It can be seen from Table 5 that when the cooperative goal dependence is high, the conditional indirect effect of career plateau on knowledge hiding through status anxiety is 0.284, the standard deviation is 0.073, and the confidence interval [0.1505, 0.4419] does not contain 0, which indicates that the mediating effect of status anxiety is significant in this case. When the cooperative goal dependence is low, the conditional indirect effect of career plateau on knowledge hiding through status anxiety is 0.187, the standard deviation is 0.067, and the confidence interval [-0.0583, 0.3215] contains 0, indicating that the mediating effect of status anxiety is not significant in this case. At this time, the difference value of conditional indirect effect is 0.097, the standard deviation is 0.047, and the confidence interval [-0.0149, 0.1659] contains 0. It can be seen that the moderated mediating effect of the career plateau on knowledge hiding is not significant. Hypothesis 6 does not hold. Similarly, it can be seen from Table 5 that hypothesis 6c is not true.

It can be seen from Table 5 that when the cooperative goal dependence is high, the conditional indirect effect of

hierarchical plateau on knowledge hiding through status anxiety is 0.281, the standard deviation is 0.078, and the confidence interval [0.1521, 0.4525] does not contain 0, indicating that the mediating effect of status anxiety is significant in this case. When the cooperative goal dependence is low, the conditional indirect effect of hierarchical plateau on knowledge hiding through status anxiety is 0.131, the standard deviation is 0.074, and the confidence interval [0.0048, 0.2798] does not contain 0, indicating that the mediating effect of status anxiety is significant in this case. At this time, the difference value of conditional indirect effect is 0.150, the standard deviation is 0.065, and the confidence interval [0.0071, 0.2532] does not contain 0. It can be seen that the moderated mediating effect of hierarchical plateau on knowledge hiding is significant. However, the conditional indirect effect of cooperative goal dependence at a high value is greater than that of cooperative goal dependence at a low value, which is contrary to hypothesis 6a, so hypothesis 6a does not hold.

It can also be seen from Table 5 that hypothesis 6b holds. Because the difference value of conditional indirect effect is -0.049, the standard deviation is 0.052, and the confidence interval [-0.1182, -0.0672] does not contain 0, the moderated mediating effect of work content plateau on knowledge hiding is significant.

5. Discussion

5.1 Main Findings

This study takes the cognitive-affective system theory of personality as the whole logic, integrates resource preservation theory and cooperation and competition theory to investigate the influence mechanism of Career Plateau on knowledge workers' knowledge hiding. The results show that career plateau (including its three dimensions: hierarchical plateau, work content plateau and inclusive plateau) has a significant positive impact on status anxiety and knowledge hiding of knowledge workers, and status anxiety plays a complete mediating effect between career plateau (including hierarchical plateau, work content plateau and inclusive plateau) and knowledge hiding of knowledge workers. Cooperative goal dependence positively moderates the relationship between hierarchical plateau and status anxiety, and negatively regulates the relationship between work content plateau and status anxiety. In addition, cooperative goal dependence positively moderates the indirect effect of hierarchical plateau on the knowledge workers' knowledge hiding through status anxiety, and negatively moderates the indirect effect of work content plateau on the knowledge workers' knowledge hiding through status anxiety.

Table 5. Analytical Results of Moderated Mediation Effects

Independent Variable	Conditional Indirect Effect			
	Moderating Variable	The Effect on Knowledge Hiding	SE	Bootstrap95% CI
Career Plateau	High Value	0.284**	0.073	[0.1505,0.4419]
	Low Value	0.187	0.067	[-0.0583,0.3215]
	Difference Value	0.097	0.047	[-0.0149,0.1659]
Hierarchical Plateau	High Value	0.281***	0.078	[0.1521,0.4525]
	Low Value	0.131***	0.074	[0.0048,0.2798]
	Difference Value	0.150**	0.065	[0.0071,0.2532]
Work Content Plateau	High Value	0.142***	0.048	[0.0473,0.2499]
	Low Value	0.191**	0.075	[0.0612,0.3522]
	Difference Value	-0.049**	0.052	[-0.1182,-0.0672]
Inclusive Plateau	High Value	0.142***	0.057	[0.0314,0.2573]
	Low Value	0.040	0.047	[-0.0577,0.1327]
	Difference Value	0.102	0.037	[-0.0025,0.1468]

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Firstly, this study investigates the mechanism of career plateau on knowledge hiding of knowledge workers from the perspective of career development, which helps scholars and employees to more comprehensively understand the antecedent mechanism of knowledge hiding in the workplace and the scope of potential consequences related to career plateau of knowledge workers. Existing studies have explored the causes of knowledge hiding at the individual level from demographic variables, personality characteristics and cognitive and psychological aspects such as psychological ownership and territory cognition^[11], but few studies have explored the impact of individual career development needs on knowledge hiding. This study undoubtedly broadens the research perspective of antecedent mechanism of knowledge hiding in the workplace. The existing research on career plateau is more related to distal work attitude (e.g. lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment) and withdrawal behavior (e.g. resignation). This study connects career plateau with proximal work behavior (e.g. knowledge hiding of knowledge workers), which undoubtedly enriches the literature on the potential consequences of career plateau of knowledge workers in the workplace.

Secondly, this study enriches the research of structural dimension of career plateau. So far, the research on career plateau and hierarchical plateau has gained overwhelming attention in the literature in this field^[1], while the research on work content plateau and inclusive plateau is relatively lacking^[3]. This study explores the influence of work content plateau and inclusive Plateau on knowledge hiding of knowledge workers, which undoubtedly enriches and expands the research field of career plateau.

Thirdly, this study proposes and tests the mediating role of status anxiety between career plateau and knowledge hiding of knowledge workers, which enriches our understanding of the mechanism of career plateau. Most of the existing studies on the mechanism of career plateau are from the perspective of attitude^[4] and cognition^[5], and most of them are based on social exchange theory^[4], incentive-contribution model^[1] or organizational justice theory^[5]. In the field of plateau research, few studies focus on the important role of emotion in the impact of career plateau. Based on the cognitive-affective system theory of personality and the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion, this study proposes and verifies the mediating role of status anxiety in the relationship between career plateau and knowledge hiding, which enriches the research content and theoretical basis of career plateau from the perspective of emotion.

Fourth, this study proposes and tests the moderating role of cooperative goal dependence, which enriches our understanding of the boundary conditions of the mechanism of career plateau. Based on the cognitive-affective system theory of personality, integrating resource preservation theory and cooperation and competition theory, this study verified the negative moderating effect of cooperative goal dependence on the relationship between work content plateau and status anxiety, and the negative moderating effect of the indirect effect of work content plateau on knowledge hiding of knowledge workers through status anxiety. However, the moderating effect of cooperative goal dependence on the relationship between hierarchical plateau and status anxiety, the moderating effect of cooperative goal dependence on the indirect effect of hierarchical plateau on knowledge hiding of knowledge workers through status anxiety are contrary to theoretical reasoning. The reason is not in conflict with the theory of cooperation and competition. Johnson and Johnson^[44] believe that the motivation for individuals to take action to achieve their preset goals comes from their internal tension, and the driving force of cooperative behavior comes from people's desire to achieve their own goals. Goal dependence urges individuals to help each other for the benefit of collective productivity^[45], because as individuals, they will benefit. According to the inducement-contribution model, promotion demand represents the inducement of employees' expectation, while higher cooperative goal dependence indicates employees' individual contribution to the organization. Hierarchical plateau is related to hierarchical promotion stagnation, when knowledge workers in the plateau period of hierarchy are faced with higher cooperative goals, it means that they need to complete challenging tasks and take more responsibility, which is prone to inducement-contribution imbalance. Combined with the theory of distracted conflict, when a person tries to pay attention to others and the ongoing task at the same time, the conflict will lead to arousal and pressure, and social barriers will occur in difficult tasks. Therefore, it may aggravate the psychological and status anxiety of being reluctant to seek, and promote knowledge hiding.

5.3 Practical Implications

This study also provides some practical implications for managers. First of all, in order to reduce the adverse impact of employees' career plateau on the organization as far as possible, it is necessary to strengthen employees' career management and open up their career development channels. There are many aspects of employees' career development needs in the organization, such as vertical promotion, knowledge learning and skills training, and

employees' centralized needs. In addition to promotion, organizations can use flexible compensation design to link with employees' skills and contributions, so as to alleviate employees' perception of hierarchical plateau. It can provide learning and skill development opportunities for employees by improving job skill diversity, job rotation and team tasks, and eliminate employees' plateau perception of work content. Managers can take measures such as empowerment, work autonomy and participation in decision-making to improve employees' perception of informal power in the organization, so as to eliminate employees' perception of inclusive plateau.

Secondly, it should strengthen the training of employees and guide them to establish a reasonable outlook of career development. We should not only make employees realize that with the development of their career, hierarchical plateau is an inevitable phenomenon of career development, but also guide them to establish rational success criteria. We should not only measure the success of their career by objective upward promotion, but also treat career development by their own skill development, contribution and Industry reputation.

Thirdly, managers need to create face-to-face communication opportunities for employees in various ways, and fully understand employees' psychological, career development needs and mental health status. On the one hand, we can adopt personalized flexible countermeasures to meet the needs of employees' career development; on the other hand, we can pay attention to employees' mental state and mental health, actively implement humanistic care and timely psychological counseling, so as to avoid employees' bad psychological and mental distress due to work pressure.

Finally, it should enrich and improve the construction path of knowledge management system. Although the theorists believe that cooperative goal dependence can promote knowledge sharing, this study finds that the promotion of cooperative goal dependence on knowledge sharing is also limited by the situation. Therefore, it is necessary to enrich and improve the construction path of knowledge management system. For example, in addition to making full use of modern information management system, we should formulate and improve the incentive mechanism of knowledge sharing to stimulate employees' willingness to share knowledge. Establishing a good communication mechanism in the workplace to promote mutual understanding and trust among employees can avoid knowledge hiding and promote knowledge sharing to a certain extent.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Like all studies, this study has some limitations. First, the measurement of each variable in this study is self-reported from a single source, which will produce common method bias. In the future, we can try to obtain data from multi-channel and multi-source, such as pairing, in order to improve the authenticity and objectivity of data and reduce common method bias. Secondly, the research samples are from some enterprises in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai in China, and the region where the samples are located has certain limitations, which limits the universality of the research results to a certain extent. Future research needs to expand the scope of the samples to test the scientificity of the research conclusions. Third, considering that knowledge workers in enterprises may experience hierarchical plateau, work content plateau or inclusive plateau at the same time, future research can consider the interaction of hierarchical plateau, work content plateau and inclusive plateau, and suggest the introduction and integration of multiple views and theories to understand this phenomenon.

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