



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**A STUDY OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER PLATEAU AND
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN OIL PALM SECTOR**

**Jessica Unnai Anak Anggai
61034**

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A STUDY OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER PLATEAU AND
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN OIL PALM SECTOR

JESSICA UNNAI ANAK ANGGAI

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The project entitled 'A Study of Relationship between Career Plateau and Organizational Commitment in Oil Palm Sector' was prepared by Jessica Unnai Anak Anggai and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resource Development)

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(NIK NORSYAMIMI MD NOR)

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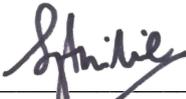
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ABSTRACT

Career plateau has been an issue and challenge for most organizations in almost all sectors. Many researchers have connected career plateau with negative consequences such as lower degree of job satisfaction and organizational commitment which led to turnover intention. Therefore, this research explores the relationship between hierarchical plateau and the three components of organizational commitment, namely affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Data has been collected from 50 employees who worked more than five years in oil palm sectors. Questionnaire survey is applied to gather information and Pearson Correlation Coefficient is used to test the relationship between both variables. Result reveals that hierarchical plateau is significantly and negatively related to affective commitment and normative commitment, but positively related to continuance commitment. The research findings provided a new insight regarding career development as an influence factor which is able to influence employees' commitment. Plateau employees reported to have less emotional attachment and do not sense moral obligation towards organizations, but perceived employee benefits as a motivational factor to remain working. The implications, recommendations, and limitations of this study and direction for future research are also discussed based on the research findings.

Keywords: career plateau, hierarchical plateau, career development, organizational commitment, affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment.

ABSTRAK

Kerjaya mendatar telah menjadi isu dan cabaran bagi kebanyakan organisasi di hampir semua sektor. Banyak penyelidik telah menghubungkan kerjaya mendatar dengan kesan negatif seperti berlaku penurunan terhadap tahap kepuasan kerja dan komitmen organisasi lalu mewujudkan keinginan untuk meninggalkan organisasi. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini meneroka hubungan antara dataran hierarki dan tiga komponen komitmen organisasi, iaitu komitmen afektif, komitmen berterusan, dan komitmen normatif. Data telah dikumpulkan dari 50 orang pekerja yang telah bekerja lebih dari lima tahun di sektor kelapa sawit. Tinjauan soal selidik digunakan untuk mengumpulkan maklumat dan Pearson Correlation Coefficient digunakan untuk menguji hubungan antara kedua-dua pemboleh ubah. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa dataran hierarki secara signifikan dan negatif berkaitan dengan komitmen afektif dan komitmen normatif, tetapi secara positif berhubung dengan komitmen berterusan. Penemuan penyelidikan memberikan pandangan baharu mengenai perkembangan kerjaya sebagai faktor yang dapat mempengaruhi komitmen pekerja. Pekerja dengan kerjaya mendatar dilaporkan memiliki keterikatan emosi yang kurang dan tidak merasakan kewajipan moral terhadap organisasi, tetapi menganggap alternatif pekerjaan sebagai faktor motivasi untuk terus bekerja. Implikasi, cadangan, dan batasan kajian ini dan arah untuk penyelidikan masa depan telah dibincangkan berdasarkan penemuan kajian.

Kata kunci: dataran tinggi kerjaya, dataran tinggi hierarki, pengembangan kerjaya, komitmen organisasi, komitmen afektif, komitmen berterusan, komitmen normatif.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Agriculture industry is well known as the fundamental for the development of Malaysian's economy where a total of RM 4.417 billion has been allocated in Budget 2019 (Bernama, 2018). The aim is (a) to develop the agriculture sector, (b) to increase the productivity and income of fishermen, farmers, agro-based industries, and (c) to improve research and development activities (R&D). In 2017, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the agriculture industry is RM 96.0 billion (8.2%). Oil palm sector stated as the largest contributor with 46.6 percent and followed by other agriculture (18.6%), livestock (11.4%), fishing (10.5%), rubber (7.3%), and forestry and logging (5.6%). However, the value of gross fixed capital report declined to 1.0 percent due to adverse development in rubber and oil palm activities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). Once again, the oil palm grew 8.4 percent slower in the third quarter of 2019 compared to the last quarter of 9.5 percent (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019b). This phenomenon may be related to the decrease in labor productivity per hour and labor productivity by employment in the second quarter of 2019 (2.2% and 2.1%).

The poor performance of oil palm development can be attributed to the degree of employees' commitment. Owing to previous studies, organizational commitment often associated with positive behavior, such as having high level of job performance (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014), job involvement, and job satisfaction (Abdallah, Obeidet, Aqqad, Al Janini, & Dahiyat, 2017) which directly contribute to increase organization performance. As mentioned by Kamaruddin, Abdullah, and Ayob (2018) job satisfaction found positively related to work outcomes, for instance increased work efficiency and productivity along with reduced absenteeism and turnover intentions. This shows commitment related to the needs of

satisfaction and achievement factors. According to Batau and Mohamed (2016) employees begin to perform below standard when job opportunities and benefits do not meet their expectations. The degree of organizational commitment has found significantly correlated with work opportunities such as promotion, development, and recognition opportunity (Cicekli & Kabasakal, 2017).

In view of worldwide, promotion opportunity is recognized as a crucial element to enhance an organization's reputation and success (Busari, Mughal, Khan, Rasool, & Kiyani, 2017). Promotion is seen as an appreciation for hard work in achieving the needs of the organization by employees (Miles, Gordon, & Christine, 2013). However, careers plateau has become an essential issue in most organizations regardless of sector as organizational structure becomes more flatter (Hossain, 2018). In addition, the evolution of technology has made it worse by reducing the number of higher positions or professional teams (Kamlan, Mohammad Yaghoubi, Noori, Kaseb, & Jooyami, 2016). In accordance with the vacancies for skilled workers, namely managers, professionals, technicians, and associate professionals reported only 27.4 percent compared to semi-skilled (59.8%) and low-skilled (12.8%) employees (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019a). This proves most employees predicted to experience plateauing sooner or later. For all these reasons, employees will stay away from being attached to jobs and organizations which in turn increase turnover intentions and decrease organization productivity (Godshalk & Fender, 2015).

Additionally, female employees expected to experience plateau faster than male employees which is known as glass ceiling. According to Walsh, Fleming, and Enz (2016) most organizations lack on developing, retaining, and advancing female talent. Therefore, women often face obstacles to get equal opportunities because their main roles are more likely to fulfill family needs (Haimid, Rozana, & Abdul, 2016). Discrimination in employment opportunity directly decrease the number of women involvement in workforce

(Sakariyau & Ummu, 2017). This can be seen through the Malaysian labour force rate based on gender, the number of female workers is 6.11 million (39.1%) while the male worker with 9.49 million (60.9%) for the second quarter of 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019c).

To conclude, the oil palm sector plays important roles as the largest contributor in Malaysian's economy, but career plateau phenomena has affected the degree of productivity. This indicates plateauing may influence employees' commitment which in turn reduces the intention to remain motivated in meeting the organization goals. Thus, the current study will examine the relationship between career plateau and organizational commitment among employees in the oil palm sector.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Career plateau is a point where employees stagnate in the same positions without attaining any vertical or horizontal movement in their career life (Galhena & Liyanage, 2013). In relation, plateau is acknowledged as a serious problem by any organization due to its potential adverse effects on individuals and organizations. According to Tharkude and Gankar (2018) career plateau has been used as antecedent to negative work outcomes namely, high stress rates, low satisfaction, withdrawal symptoms, poor performance, low organizational commitment, and increased turnover intention. As this issue is a vital concern to be addressed, thus the main purpose of present study is to understand the existing theoretical, methodological, empirical, and practical gaps in the context of career plateau in order to improve organizational commitment.

First and foremost, the labour productivity by hours for agriculture declined to 2.2 percent from 3.0 percent in the second quarter of 2019. Labour productivity is driven by three main elements; physical capital, technology, and human capital development (Chappelow, 2019). This reveals that human capital development is important to ensure employees

perform well in attaining organizational goals. The degree of employees' commitment will depend on how sufficient an organization manages the career development plan (Phipps, Prieto, & Ndinguri, 2013). This event is related to social exchange theory, where both employers and employees play major roles in achieving different interests (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2017). Social exchange theory refers to voluntary involvement of individuals which are motivated by the returns, and they are expected to perform another favor in exchange (Cook & Rice, 2006). However, plateaued employees remain committed to perform above standard despite the poor working opportunities. According to Omar, Anuar, Salleh, and Yaakop (2014) employees do not bother to be plateau as they have no choice but to experience it since plateau is an inevitable phenomenon. In relation to social exchange theory, an inadequate employment benefit is no longer a major contributor to reducing employees' commitment in fulfilling organizational goals. It shows the absence of promotion may no longer influence the degree of employees' commitment. Therefore, the present study aims to examine whether career plateau is significantly associated with organizational commitment.

Many existing empirical research found support for the correlation between career plateau and organizational commitment which in turn led to turnover intention (Hofstetter & Cohen, 2014; Xie, Xin, & Bai, 2016). There are certain studies found that career orientation practices change due to the plateau phenomena where employees rapidly move from one organization to another with aim to achieve career aspiration (Abdallah et al., 2017; Choudhary, Ramzan, & Riaz, 2013). An idea of inter-organization orientation becomes well-known as employees refuse a lifetime career in a particular organization (Choudhary et al., 2013). This is because employees who consider promotion as the primary indicator of career success will decide to quit if the organization is unable to provide promotion opportunities. For all these reasons, the issue of plateauing arises due to loss of a huge number of expertise

or manpower that has the greatest contribution towards the success of organization (Omar et al., 2014).

The plateauing becomes worse when it occurs among the leader in-group which may influence the team's productivity as a whole. According to Choudhary et al. (2013) managers known for their high job security also suffer plateau. Conner (2014) states that once influential plateau leaders are identified, the tendency for members' in-group to follow the same footsteps is high. These plateau leaders are not only performing below standard, but may exhibit negative undesirable work outcomes such as low satisfaction and high turnover intention. As a result, the attitudes and behaviors of in-group members will be driven by less responsible leaders.

More specifically, empirical studies have demonstrated that career plateau is significantly correlated to organizational commitment (Drucker-Godard, Fouque, Gollety, & Flanchec, 2015; Farooq & Tufail, 2017; Hossain, 2018). Nevertheless, there is an inconsistent result of predicting the impact of career plateau on employees' commitment (Omar et al., 2014). After reviewing the literature, employees do not bother too much of being plateau as long as organization acknowledge their investment (Cicekli & Kabasakal, 2017) and pay their fairly (Omar et al., 2014). Therefore, this study attempts to link the direct relationship between career plateau and organizational commitment among employees in the oil palm sector.

Practically, Malaysian government is demanding to cut off low-skilled foreign workers in the oil palm sector. The country aims to reduce a huge number of foreign workers by around 130,000 employees in five years and at the same time hire more high-skilled local people (Bloomberg, 2019). Nageeb said local people still do not want to work in the plantation sector "even though the company provides housing, water supply, electricity, transportation and even cooking oil and rice" (Bernama, 2019). In fact, work opportunities

and additional benefits that have been offered by the firms are not attractive enough due to instability of income, no future and no entertainment (Mohammad Amizi, Abdullah, & Ali, 2015). This clearly shows the perception of Malaysian that working in the oil palm sector has no future since there is a lack of career advancement intervention. The plantation company failed to meet the needs of local people and as a result, they refused to remain in such a sector. In short, the absence of a career development plan such as no clear policy on wages and career path can influence individual intention to work in one organization. Therefore, the current study attempts to indicate the relationship between career plateau and organizational commitment.

From a methodological perspective, most studies on career plateau have been conducted among managerial populations and there is a lack of research regarding solid citizens that represent a huge number of employees in organization (Badiane, 2016). There are a number of studies on career plateau that test the research hypotheses and draw conclusions based on a sample of top management or managers (e.g., Galhena & Liyanage, 2013; Hossain, 2018). For that reason, these past findings may have a limited holistic view of career plateau in the workplace context among ordinary employees. Apart from that, Drucker-godard et al. (2015) argues that data collected from scholars may be significantly different from the data obtained from organizational personnel. For instance, studies of career plateau were found significant among scholars (Drucker-Godard et al., 2015), but plateaus were found to be not significant in the studies among nurses (Omar et al., 2014). Thus, a study of career plateau and organizational commitment among the oil palm employees is important because the results of previous studies are inconsistent due to different populations.

In addition, career plateau has received little observation and attention in the literature lately (ShakilaDevi & Basariya, 2019). Thus, a current study is needed to improve the body of knowledge for better work outcomes. Besides, the majority of previous studies explore the

concept of career plateau objectively which categories employees who remain in the same position for more than 5 years in a particular organization as plateau (Omar et al., 2014). The concern is the results of analysis may be invalid which leads to inaccurate findings.

Therefore, the current research instrument has used two approaches namely objective and subjective career plateau to gather information from respondents. Overall, this study aims to investigate the link between career plateau and the three-component of organizational commitment.

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

1.2.1 General objective

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between career plateau and organizational commitment among employees in the oil palm sector.

1.2.2 Specific objective

The several specific objectives are identified in this study and are as follows:

- a) To identify the relationship between hierarchical plateau and affective commitment.
- b) To identify the relationship between hierarchical plateau and continuance commitment.
- c) To identify the relationship between hierarchical plateau and normative commitment.

1.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis for this study as stated below:

- H_{a1}: There is a significant relationship between hierarchical plateau and affective commitment.
- H_{a2}: There is a significant relationship between hierarchical plateau and continuance commitment.
- H_{a3}: There is a significant relationship between hierarchical plateau and normative commitment.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study which comprises the element of an independent variable and dependent variables.

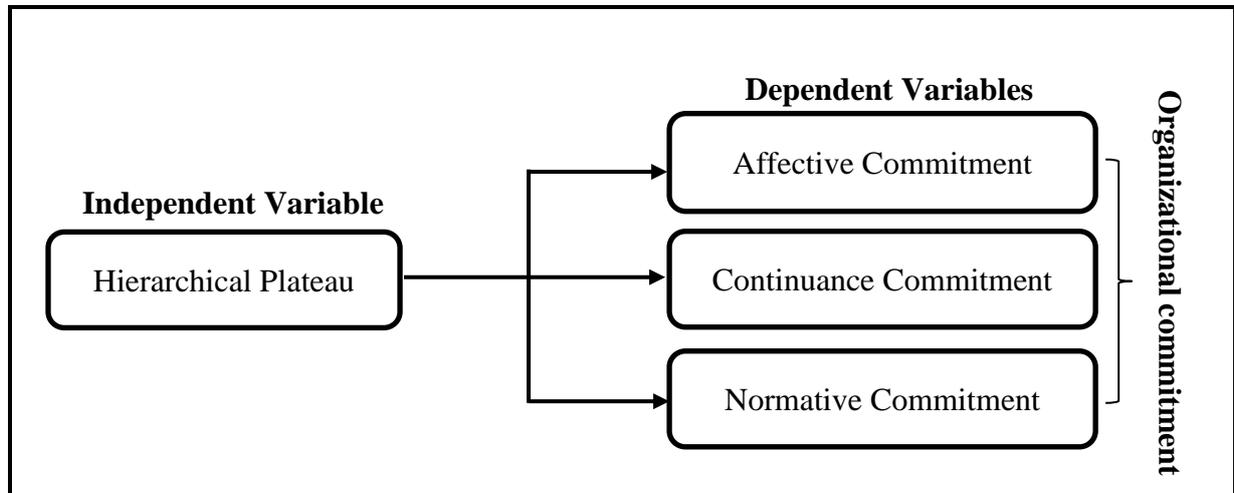


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the connection between career plateau and organizational commitment. Adapted from "Effect of structural/ content career plateaus on job involvement: Do institutional/ occupational intentions matter?", by T. W, Su, J. H. Kuo, Y. H. Cheung, C. Z. Hung, S. H. Lu, and J. W. Cheng, 2017, *Universal Journal of Management*, 5(4), p.191.

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The definition of terms is divided into conceptual and operational definition:

1.5.1 Career plateau

- a) Conceptual definition: According to Hossain (2018) career plateau is a point in one's career life where the chance of promotion is low. A plateau can be defined as a stage in one's career where one feels the likelihood of future promotion is low and does not feel challenged due to lack of new job duties (Tharkude & Gankar, 2018).
- b) Operational definition Career plateau refers to employees who remain working in the same position with similar job scope for five years and above.

1.5.2 Hierarchical plateau

- a) Conceptual definition: According to Conner (2014), hierarchical plateau is known as structural plateau which refers to the likelihood of vertical movement within an organization is limited due to few opening positions or criteria are difficult and complex to attain those positions.
- b) Operational definition: Hierarchical plateau is defined as the point in a person's career where an individual feels little opportunity for further vertical movement in a particular organization.

1.5.3 Organizational commitment

- a) Conceptual definition: Organizational commitment is defined as strong belief in the goals and values of organizations and willingness to makes significant effort on behalf of organization (Drucker-Godard et al., 2015).
- b) Operational definition: Organizational commitment is defined as the degree of the engagement between employee and organization that influences the decision to continue or discontinues the organizational membership among the employees.

1.5.4 Affective commitment

- a) Conceptual definition: Affective commitment refers to an individual's emotional attachment and feelings to connect with an organization (Voigt & Hirst, 2015).
- b) Operational definition: Affective commitment reflects an emotional attachment to continue as a member of an organization.

1.5.5 Continuance commitment

- a) Conceptual definition: Continuance commitment reflects a willingness to continue working with the organization as it considers the costs of leaving (Phipps et al., 2013).
- b) Operational definition: Continuance commitment refers to a sense of losing the job benefits due to stop working in a particular organization.

1.5.6 Normative Commitment

- a) Conceptual definition: Normative commitment is a reflection of moral obligation to remain as an organizational member (Ogunyemi, 2018).
- b) Operational definition: Normative commitment refers to the feelings of obligation to continue in an organization.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This research has contributed to three main aspects namely the body of knowledge, organizations, and human resource practitioners.

1.6.1 Significant to body of knowledge

The significance of this research to the body of knowledge is to enrich the current information on career plateau and organizational commitment. Throughout this study, employers will understand the impact of career stagnation on organizational productivity. Organization becomes more sensitive about career aspiration by providing promotion in relation to improve employee job performance. Thus, this study can be a guideline for management to design strategic solutions to deal with the adverse effects of career plateau. On the other hand, this research can enhance employees understanding about career plateau phenomena in the workplace context. Employees can learn how to manage their career path before reaching plateau by participant in career development programs to continue learning new skills and knowledge. For that reasons, employees will remain committed to meet organizational goals as they personally develop even the chances to move vertically is low.

Apart from that, the concept, theories, and models which has been used in this study can enhance the understanding of researchers and readers regarding career plateau. The conceptual discussion about variable will contributes to knowledge how plateauing can emerge due to structural and economy changes. Meanwhile, the theories and models will contribute to better insight on how career plateau is related to organizational commitment

which led to influence turnover intention. In short, this research will provide in-depth information on how career plateau associated with organizational commitment.

1.6.2 Significance to organization

In addition, this present study can be a guideline to improve promotional policies and procedures. The policies should include particular criteria which will determine the employee is eligible for promotion and it must be written in the employer's handbook. For the procedure, the organization should present and communicate the steps on how to apply for a higher position as soon as job openings are available. Therefore, employees will know which areas need to be improved so that they entitled to higher positions. On the other hand, this research aims to warn employers to be fair in carrying out promotion policies where it cannot bias towards employees in certain age and gender. Hence, employees will remain committed as employers realize their needs for career achievement.

In short, the findings of this research can be used as basic knowledge to improve organizational policy which may help organization to sustain competitive advantages. By referring to policy, organization can create a strategic plan regarding career development program which aid to increase organizational commitment. As a result, the effective career plan may assists employees to maintain commitment as a way to repay organization effort on providing development opportunities.