


## Career plateau and work performance among employees in a methanol company in Malaysia



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### ABSTRACT

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Organizational performance is closely linked to company productivity, with employee work performance being pivotal to overall success. This study investigates the relationship between career plateau and work performance among employees at a methanol company. Interestingly, the works on career plateau and work performance among employees has never been explored in the nation's methanol company. Thus, it would be interesting to understand the impact of work plateau on employees' work performance. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed among employee in a methanol company. Employees from various departments had participated with a response of 300 complete data. The study discovered that work plateau significantly and positively influenced both task performance and contextual performance. Unfortunately, the hierarchical plateau had a negative but insignificant relationship with these performance metrics. To boost work performance and productivity, management should address employee concerns comprehensively to avoid career plateaus among employees in the methanol company. Finally, the study elaborates on the findings that impacted the methanol company and its employees. The findings of this study are expected to provide benefits to the parties involved, whether it is the management of the methanol company or its employees. This finding can provide the information and exposure needed to further improve the quality of work performance for staff in the energy sector as well as in the oil and gas sector.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This paper explores the career plateau, namely work plateau and hierarchy plateau, in relation to work performance, namely task performance and contextual performance, in a methanol company.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The success of an organization rests on the shoulders of the staff or employees of the organization itself (Jamaludin & Zawawi, 2014). Moreover, human resource management is also an important factor in an organization to achieve the plans and goals formed. Ghazi and Jalali (2017) stated that employees are the most valuable asset in an organization and are the main movers that smooth the journey of the organization involved in achieving the goals, objectives, vision, mission, and targets that have been set.

To produce a quality organization, the work environment is an element that needs attention. In addition, work performance can also be evaluated based on the output received. Job performance is also said to be a continuous process of communication between employees and supervisors, aiming to achieve a clear understanding of the work

to be achieved (Abou-Moghli, 2015). Lawler, Porter, and Tennenbaum (1968) stated that performance can be measured in three ways. The first involves evaluating the "output" of work, such as the amount of sales within a specific timeframe or the results of group production. The second method involves assessing an individual's performance through external evaluation by another person. The third method entails self-assessment of one's own performance. Work performance can be divided into two, namely task performance and contextual performance. Apart from the staff who complete the tasks given for example, ensuring that the product is always in good condition and tidy, task performance can also be seen when a work or task can be planned and organized well. Next, the good cooperation between the staff and the initiative shown by the staff are the best examples of contextual performance. Biswakarma (2016) stated that service quality can critically produce customer satisfaction, where one of the components of service quality is dependent on employee performance.

A common sign of a career plateau is when experienced employees reach a point in their career where they feel they have reached the maximum limit of their professional growth and there are no more opportunities for them to progress within the organization. This can also affect an employee's motivation and subsequently reduce the productivity of the employee's work. Organizations need to provide continuous training and development opportunities to staff, especially to experienced staff to help them continue to grow and progress in their careers. The opportunities and planning provided can help to avoid career plateaus and can ensure that experienced staff remain enthusiastic and motivated.

This study was conducted to identify the relationship between career plateau and work performance among the employees of a methanol company in Malaysia. This study involves almost all staff including executives and non-executives. Researchers have found that studies related to career plateaus on work performance have still not been conducted by previous researchers. Furthermore, there is no related study between career plateau and work performance that has ever been carried out at a methanol company. To conduct a study to identify the relationship between career plateaus and work performance among the employees of the methanol company were selected to understand the extent to which the relationship between these two variables is related.

Through the research conducted, the methanol company's management was able to find out the importance of the cause and effect of career plateaus on the work performance of staff as well as the performance of the organization in general. The result of this study is also very important because it can be a reference material for the organization in understanding the problems and challenges faced by the staff at work and subsequently, the management can improve the quality of management through the identification of weaknesses in the existing system and culture. The changes made by the organization sometimes do not benefit the staff and even side with only one party. Because of this, the results of this study can be a reference for management or organizational groups to further develop the organization in the future.

This study can also be a guide for future researchers or others in conducting studies related to career plateaus or career plateaus and work performance. Finally, through this study, all facts and findings can be used by all parties as a stepping stone to empower quality human capital in the private and public sector services in this country. It is also hoped to be able to be an effective basis for the consolidation of strategy, the formation of organizational direction as well as the strengthening of the organization in the development of holistic human capital management.

### *1.1. Problem Statement*

Work performance can be evaluated with the level of achievement of an organization. To achieve growth and profit targets, organizations need to determine the direction of the organization's goals or goals to ensure improvement in their performance (Dharmanegara, Sitiari, & Wirayudha, 2016). Biswakarma (2016) stated that they assume that behavior is related to the objectives of the organization itself which can be evaluated in the form of the extent to which the behavior can contribute to the achievement of the objectives of an organization where one of the components of service quality is dependent on employee performance. In this study, task performance and contextual

performance are two types of performance evaluated by the researcher. Productivity and staff turnover are the two main performance indicators of an organization (Ganing, Hassan, & Hamzah, 2020). These indicators are often widely used by industrial organizations today because they are directly related to employee progress as well as organizational growth.

However, negative attitudes among staff such as laziness, stealing bones, and skipping tasks can affect the achievement and also the performance of the department. The attitude and behavior displayed by the staff will affect the performance, especially the performance of the task. Work and organizational performance can be improved if the five dimensions of contextual performance are paid attention to by employees of the methanol company, among which are volunteering, continuous extra effort, helping and cooperating, complying with organizational rules and procedures and supporting organizational objectives.

This negative attitude often arises if staff motivation is at the lowest level. Among the factors that affect the lack of motivation is no opportunity for promotion or career development, which in turn affects job satisfaction, service quality and work performance are influenced by organizational rewards related to promotions, which lead to higher satisfaction among those who advance vertically (Grusky, 1966). Along with increased pay and status, moving up the hierarchy typically brings greater recognition, power, influence, opportunities for achievement, and challenges (Berlew & Hall, 1966; Bray & Howard, 1980). Thus, this study intends to examine the career plateau and work performance among employees in a methanol company in Malaysia. The objectives of this study are:

- a) To identify the relationship and impact between work plateau and task performance.
- b) To identify the relationship and impact between hierarchy plateau and task performance.
- c) To identify the relationship and impact between work plateau and contextual performance.
- d) To identify the relationship and impact between hierarchy plateau and contextual performance.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Work Performance

Noel (2009) stated that work performance is a process where a manager is responsible for ensuring employee productivity towards the achievement of organizational goals. Rotundo and Sackett (2002) argue that work performance refers to the behavior of individuals who have a relationship with their work activities and it involves actions that contribute to the organization's goals.

Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, and Judge (2007) stated that if a person does work that suits their personality traits, they can improve work performance. According to Campbell and Wiernik (2015) job performance is a construct comprising behaviors controlled by employees that contribute to organizational goals, followed by productivity to ensure optimal organizational operation (Herlickson, 2009). While various dimensions have been proposed, such as safety performance (Burke, Sarpy, Tesluk, & Smith-Crowe, 2002) and adaptive performance (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000) job performance is primarily categorized into three main domains: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior (Sackett & Lievens, 2008). The study conducted by Nordin and Hassan (2019) aims to examine the factors that affect work commitment to work performance among civil servants at the Penang Community Development Department. The elements of work commitment that are analyzed are based on four main factors which are supervision factors, peer factors, income factors, and interest factors. The results of the study found that the level of work performance in this department is high. This is due to the commitment given by the civil servant, and this is influenced by the factor of interest in doing work. Meanwhile, the level of work commitment given by employees is dependent on the treatment given by management (Bendix, 1956; Conrad, 1985).

### 2.2. Task Performance

Task performance, also referred to as task performance, involves behaviors that contribute to the production of goods or the provision of services (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). It includes behaviors that vary by job and are often

outlined in the job description (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2012). Since it pertains to core tasks, finding a generic framework for task performance is challenging, leading to the use of context-specific frameworks instead. Generic frameworks that include task performance indicators involve completing work assignments, maintaining up-to-date knowledge, working accurately and neatly, planning and organizing, and solving problems collaboratively (Koopmans et al., 2011).

Desa and Asaari (2020a) stated that task performance is considered when employees utilize skills and technical knowledge to produce goods or services through the organization's core technical processes or by performing specific tasks that support the core functions. Task performance is defined as an employee's competence in carrying out activities or tasks officially recognized as part of their job, contributing to the technical core of the organization. This can be done either directly, by engaging in the organization's technological processes, or indirectly, by providing necessary materials or services.

### 2.3. Contextual Performance

Contextual performance is crucial because it creates the organizational, social, and psychological environment that supports task activities and processes (Werner, 2000). Desa and Asaari (2020b) found that contextual performance involves employees voluntarily assisting their colleagues, maintaining good working relationships, and making extra efforts to complete tasks on time. Initially identified five dimensions of contextual performance: voluntary actions, persistent extra effort, helpfulness and cooperation, adherence to organizational rules and procedures, and support for organizational objectives. Coleman and Borman (2000) further integrated concepts such as contextual performance, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and additional behavioral roles, ultimately identifying three factors: interpersonal citizenship performance (helping, altruism), organizational citizenship performance (compliance, loyalty, support for organizational objectives, conscientiousness, civic values, rule adherence), and job/task citizenship performance (continuous, extra effort).

According to Werner (1994) there is a two-dimensional proposal for contextual performance which is one about behavior aimed at the organization, for example, suggesting work improvement, and the other about people by helping others. Contextual performance is also related to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which can also be defined as behavior that contributes to organizational goals by contributing to the social and psychological environment (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). These include tasks outside of work, initiative, proactivity, enjoyment or interest, and collaborating with others (Koopmans et al., 2011).

### 2.4. Career Plateau

Traditionally, a career plateau has been defined as the point at which the possibility of promotion through the hierarchy is low (FERENCE, Stoner, & Warren, 1977). FERENCE et al. (1977) described career plateau as a natural effect of the formation and system in the organization itself based on the results of studies that have been conducted because each individual will face a career plateau at one point in their career. Feldman and Weitz (1988) stated that career plateaus are individual. Career plateau also refers to a situation where an individual or an employee reaches a point in their professional development where they no longer experience significant growth or progress in their job. This can also be due to a lack of new opportunities, lack of training or development, or having reached the highest level in the organization. A career plateau often occurs in an organization when a highly skilled and motivated employee reaches the top level or holds a senior position in the next department and finds that there are no more opportunities to continue to advance or hold a higher position according to the organizational hierarchy. FERENCE et al. (1977) defined a career plateau as a time in a career when hierarchical advancement is highly unlikely.

According to Bardwick (1988) the longer an employee stays in the same position, the more likely they are to experience a work plateau. This can occur when employees become dissatisfied or bored with their jobs. Badiane (2016) described a work plateau as a lack of challenge, a reduction in responsibilities, and overall job monotony. A

work plateau arises when an individual's job responsibilities become repetitive and unchallenging, hindering their growth and development. This work plateau can occur when employees have been in a role for a long period and have reached the limits of their job responsibilities, leading to boredom and lack of motivation.

Employees who have an organizational plateau are employees who can perform effectively in higher positions, but the lack of job opportunities can prevent their promotion (FERENCE et al., 1977). On the other hand, personal plateau employees who are often seen by the organization as a person with less ability or lack of ability, lack of technical skills and also lack of career skills, and no desire to move to a higher position may have an impact on a person's lack of promotion opportunities.

Plateauing research has been developed by Bardwick (1988) expanding the definition of plateauing by including the hierarchical plateau, job content plateau, and life plateauing. Feldman and Weitz (1988) revised the definition of a career plateau, identifying an individual as plateaued if they are likely to accept further assignments with low responsibility. In a study on career plateaus among police officers, Burke (1989) found that plateaued officers reported lower job satisfaction, greater psychological exhaustion, reduced commitment, and higher turnover intentions. Burke (1989) also categorized participants by duration of service, considering police officers with sixteen or more years of experience as career plateaued.

### 2.5. Work Plateau

Work plateau refers to the lack of challenge, the decrease in responsibility, and the overall boredom of the job itself (Badiane, 2016). Work plateau is a different type of career plateau because it refers to a situation where employees will experience work that has become routine and lack of challenge in their job responsibilities (Milliman, 1992). Furthermore, work plateaus are also often associated with negative employee attitudes that hurt the organization. According to Yang, Niven, and Johnson (2019) the main cause of work plateau is boring or routine work that hinders the individual's development and growth. Yang et al. (2019) also think that career-related support can be very valuable by providing learning opportunities and challenges to facilitate career development and dampen the perception of career stagnation or career plateau.

### 2.6. Hierarchy Plateau

FERENCE et al. (1977) defined a hierarchical plateau as a point in a person's organizational career where promotion or promotion to a rank or position is unlikely to occur in the current organization. To a certain extent, hierarchical plateaus are inevitable because of the pyramid hierarchy in an organization itself. Therefore, the hierarchical plateau is also called a structural plateau (Bardwick, 1988). The hierarchical plateau in an organization will experience a decline in career development, this can be seen when an individual is offered a higher position and it moves vertically for the individual involved which results in a hierarchical plateau.

Previous research has identified significant differences between plateaued and non-plateaued workers. Near (1985) surveyed 199 managers across various occupations, including public administration, banking, and retail management, finding notable differences in absenteeism and relationships with supervisors. Hierarchically plateaued managers were more frequently absent and rated their supervisors less favorably compared to their non-plateaued peers (Near, 1985). Near also classified participants as career plateaued if they did not expect a promotion within the next twenty years. According to McCleese, Eby, Scharlau, and Hoffman (2007) only one published study directly examined the relationship between plateauing and stress. This study by Xie, Lu, and Zhou (2015) identified affective commitment as a mediator in the relationship between hierarchical plateau and turnover among employees in China.

### 2.7. Relationship between Work Plateau and Task Performance

A work plateau is a state in which employees perceive that their job tasks have become routine and unchallenging, leading to a lack of growth opportunities and reduced motivation. As in Feldman and Weitz (1988) cited from the

Hackman-Oldham work characteristics model, a career plateau may arise if employees experience work that has no meaning, is not challenging, and has reduced task significance. This situation can affect job satisfaction, work commitment, and general work performance. Wang, Chen, and Li (2020) found that job boredom mediated the relationship between work plateau and task performance, plus no organizational support made this relationship horizontal. When employees or staff feel that their work tasks are no longer challenging, they are more likely to experience boredom, which in turn reduces their job performance. Orpen (1983) study focused on tenure and changes in authority and responsibility also impacting performance. While a study from Nachbagauer and Riedl (2002) states that when work becomes routine, current work performance will change.

2.8. Relationship Hierarchy Plateau and Task Performance

Promotions and positions are often associated with motivation. Not having the opportunity for promotion or holding the same position for more than five years is already considered plateaued according to Yang et al. (2019). When a manager feels that raises are too small promotions are overdue or rewards are not distributed fairly, they will put less effort into doing their jobs. Feldman and Weitz (1988) pointed out that major design problems in reward systems including inequitable promotions can contribute to decreased job performance.

2.9. Relationship Work Plateau and Contextual Performance

Contextual performance refers to the voluntary behavior of employees that contributes to the functioning and effectiveness of the organization. Individual skills and abilities are some of the important things to pay attention to as an employee. Several studies have found that work plateaus have an impact on contextual performance. Similarly, Li, Liang, and Crant (2010) and Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) found that work plateau has a negative relationship with the behavior of helping employees and being involved in helping others in the organization which is a form of contextual performance. Hurst, Baranik, and Clark (2017) also observed a negative relationship between work plateau and organizational citizenship behavior as a proxy indicator of performance.

2.10. Relationship Hierarchy Plateau and Contextual Performance

Chay, Aryee, and Chew (1995) found that hierarchical plateaus had a negative impact on extra-role behavior (i.e., seeking additional responsibilities), but not on in-role behavior (i.e., managing only assigned tasks). Lemire, Saba, and Gagnon (1999) discovered a negative association between hierarchical plateaus and perceived job performance. Similarly, Allen, Potteet, and Russell (1998) reported that managers experiencing job plateaus rated their own job performance lower than their non-plateaued counterparts.

2.11. Research Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework, which is based on the relationships between the variables of career plateau (work plateau and hierarchy plateau) and work performance (task performance and contextual performance).

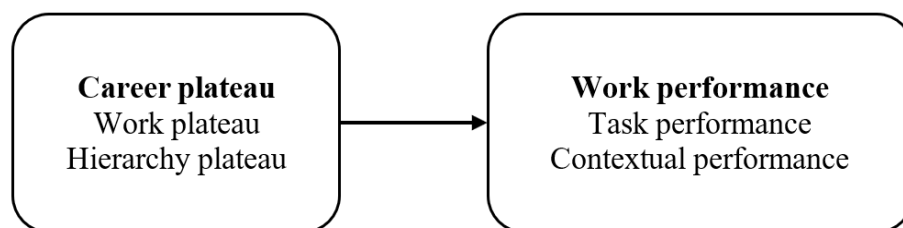


Figure 1. Research framework.



### 2.12. Hypothesis Development

Ference et al. (1977) described the career plateau as a natural effect of the formation and system in the organization itself, and each individual will face a career plateau at one point in their career. Feldman and Weitz (1988) described the career plateau as being individual. Every employee or individual will feel that his job has become routine after some period of doing it. Apart from that, work that is no longer considered challenging and limited tasks can also be considered a work plateau. As a result of the initial survey, the researcher found that there are signs of a work plateau such as routine work and increased responsibilities even though there is no promotion or position. This to some extent affects the performance of the task because the effort shown by the staff is just coughing on the stairs. There is a hypothesis developed to answer the research question to find out the extent to which plateau career relationships will affect work performance, especially task performance among employees in the methanol company. With this, the following research hypothesis is presented - H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between work plateau and task performance.

Ference et al. (1977) defined a career plateau as a time in a career when hierarchical advancement is highly unlikely. Harvey and Schultz (1987) define plateauing as a career point where employees are unlikely to receive a promotion unless they change organizations. The researcher's preliminary survey found that some of the employees in the methanol company held the job grade for so long that no higher increase would have occurred if they were still working there. In addition, another problem that is seen is the lack of opportunities for further advancement such as no suitable employment in a department. This in turn affects the performance of the task and the behavior of the employee himself. For example, an employee involved only wants to work and do work that is felt necessary and will leave work that is not in the job description. The effect of this action will have an impact on task performance and career plateaus such as the Feldman and Weitz (1988) who said that when there is too much task conflict and too much workload will contribute to career plateau. The research hypothesis can be developed after seeing that there is a relationship between the hierarchical plateau and task performance. With this, the following research hypothesis is presented - H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between the hierarchical plateau and task performance.

Ngondi (2017) stated that appropriate skills are required for each employee in an organization according to the position held so that the employee involved becomes a skilled employee. This is because skilled workers will be more prepared and confident to face new challenges than unskilled workers, thus impacting their work performance. Skilled and good employees often commit and show the best attitude such as helping friends and giving high cooperation in completing the tasks given. In addition, employees who have a work plateau can be seen as less enthusiastic and less dedicated to doing tasks because they feel there is no opportunity to improve their efficiency and personal skills. Several hypotheses have been developed to answer the questions that will be studied to find out the extent to which plateau career relationships will affect contextual performance among employees in the methanol company. With this, the following research hypothesis is presented - H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between work plateau and contextual performance.

Bardwick (1988) mentions that the hierarchical plateau is the same as the structural plateau where this hierarchical plateau cannot be avoided because of the system in an organization itself. The culture of a place greatly affects a person, this is not an exception to the staff working in a group or a department. Behavior can be linked to the culture of a place. If the behavior is good, then the culture in that place is also good, but on the other hand, if the culture of a place is negative, then the culture also becomes perverse. Contextual performance which also looks at organizational citizenship behavior or Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) can contribute to the organization's goals through the social and psychological environment through several aspects including tasks outside of work tasks, initiative as well as interest and cooperation with each other (Koopmans et al., 2011; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002).

Some employees are not interested in socializing and responding to colleagues and management because they have no work-related business with each other. In addition, introverted personality problems also affect a person's behavior so there is no good relationship between employees and management. This can affect the perspective and

perception of management or employers towards employees and staff so a hierarchical plateau can occur as a result of the lack of support from management and employers for promotion or position. Because of that, behavior plays an important role in contextual performance as well as hierarchical plateaus. With this, the following research hypothesis is presented - H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant relationship between the hierarchical plateau and contextual performance.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A methanol company was selected as a studied organization. This company has a total of more than 600 employees in various operating departments including the production department, the maintenance department, and also the HSE (Health, Safety and Environment) department. Research respondents are individuals who are the subjects of the study.

In this study, research respondents were randomly selected from among employees in the methanol company consisting of various backgrounds including from the organization's support group, namely staff from the group security department, group digital, and group procurement. The total number of respondents in this study is more than half of the total staff of the organization. The researcher chooses respondents from each department so that the results of the study do not become biased. Self-instructed questionnaires were distributed among employees in the methanol company.

Career plateau tools containing a total of 43 questions have been modified and translated into Malaysian to meet the context of the study, obtain accurate information and research findings, and make it easier for respondents to answer the survey questions.

There are two elements in the independent variable in this study, namely the work plateau and the hierarchical plateau. Both elements have six questions and both were developed by Milliman (1992). Cronbach's Alpha or reliability value for the work plateau item is 0.87 while for the hierarchy plateau item, it is 0.90.

Meanwhile, work performance tools contained two elements in the dependent variable in this study which are task performance and contextual performance.

The survey questions have been modified and translated into Malaysian to meet the context of the study, obtain accurate information and research findings, and make it easier for respondents to answer the survey questions for task performance developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) while for contextual performance developed by Coleman and Borman (2000). Cronbach's Alpha or reliability value for task performance items is 0.70 while for contextual performance items is 0.79.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Demographic Analysis

Table 1 depicts the demographic analysis on respondents in the methanol company. Majority of the respondents were male (n=260; 82%) as compared to female respondents (n=59; 18%). Furthermore, married (n=236; 74%) respondents dominated the marital status as compared to single (n=79; 25%) and other (n=4; 1%) marital status. Age-wise, majority of the respondents were between 30 to 39 (n=186; 58%) years old. These were followed by 20 to 29 (n=72; 23%) years old, 40 to 49 (n=47; 15%) years old, and above 49 (n=14; 4%) years old. Academically, diploma (n=125; 39%) respondents were the most. These were followed by undergraduate (n=105; 33%), lower certificate (n=40; 13%), other qualifications (n=19; 6%), postgraduate (n=16; 5%), and higher certificate (n=14; 4%). Finally, employment at the methanol company, majority of respondents were between 6 to 10 years (n=104; 33%). These were followed by 1 to 5 years (n=74; 23%), 11 to 15 years (n=57; 18%), below 1 (n=30; 9%), 16 to 20 years (n=29; 9%), and above 20 years (n=25; 8%).



Table 1. Demographic analysis.

Item	N	%
Gender		
Male	260	81.5
Female	59	18.5
Marital status		
Single	79	24.8
Married	236	74.0
Others	4	1.3
Age (Year-old)		
20-29	72	22.6
30-39	186	58.3
40-49	47	14.7
Above 49	14	4.4
Academic qualification		
Lower certificate	40	12.5
Higher certificate	14	4.4
Diploma	125	39.2
Undergraduate	105	32.9
Postgraduate	16	5.0
Others	19	6.0
Employment (Years)		
Below 1	30	9.4
5-Jan	74	23.2
10-Jun	104	32.6
15-Nov	57	17.9
16-20	29	9.1
Above 20	25	7.8

#### 4.2. Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted on both variables, namely career plateau and work performance. The Cronbach Alpha values ranging from 0.715 to 0.913. The highest Cronbach Alpha value was task performance with 0.913. These were followed by contextual performance with 0.892, hierarchical plateau with 0.773, and work plateau with 0.715.

#### 4.3. Correlation Analysis

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis show a positive but weak and significant correlation between work plateau and task performance ( $r=0.215$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) as well as work plateau and contextual performance ( $r=0.366$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The hierarchical plateau with task performance and contextual performance shows a negative and insignificant correlation because the p-value is only  $-0.072$  and  $-0.074$ .

#### 4.4. Regression Analysis

The findings of the study show that the  $R^2$  value obtained for task performance is 0.49 which means that independent or independent variables (work plateau and hierarchy plateau) have influenced the task performance at the methanol company by 49% while the remaining 51% is influenced by other variables that not included in the discussion. For the dependent variable of contextual performance, the  $R^2$  value obtained is 0.136 which means that independent or independent variables (work plateaus and hierarchy plateaus) only affect task performance at the methanol company by 13.6% while the remaining 86.4% are influenced by other variables that not included in the discussion.

The results of the hypothesis are depicted in Table 2 whereby 2 hypotheses were supported as compared to 2 hypotheses were rejected. Thus, regression analysis concluded that  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are supported because despite having a weak positive relationship. On the other hand, the relationship between the variables can still be seen compared to  $H_3$  and  $H_4$  where there is no significant relationship.

Table 2. Hypothesis results.

Hypothesis	Result
H <sub>1</sub> : There is a significant relationship between work plateau and task performance.	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> : There is a significant relationship between the hierarchical plateau and task performance.	Supported
H <sub>3</sub> : There is a significant relationship between work plateau and contextual performance.	Rejected
H <sub>4</sub> : There is a significant relationship between the hierarchical plateau and contextual performance.	Rejected

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

The researcher conducted a study to identify the relationship between career plateau and work performance among employees in a methanol company in Malaysia. The results of this study are expected to help and give insight to the top management, especially from the human resources department, in understanding the problems related to career plateaus among staff, thus affecting work performance and organizational performance. The researcher hopes that a method or system can be devised to make it easier for staff to step up and continue to progress in their careers without the occurrence of career plateaus and subsequently be able to improve their work performance and service quality.

Four research objectives have been formed in this study. The objective is to identify whether or not there is a relationship between work plateau and hierarchical plateau in career plateau with task performance and contextual performance in work performance. The first objective is to identify the relationship between work plateau and task performance. The second objective is to examine the relationship between hierarchical plateau and task performance. The third objective is to explore the relationship between work plateau and contextual performance. The fourth and final objective is to determine the relationship between hierarchical plateau and contextual performance. The theoretical framework of this study, which examines the link between career plateau and work performance, aims to identify relationships between the independent variables (work plateau and hierarchical plateau) and the dependent variable (work performance). Work plateau and task performance indicated a positive significant relationship but at a weak level ( $r=0.215$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with task performance while multiple regression analysis is used to test whether both - two independent variables namely work plateau and hierarchical plateau can significantly predict the dependent variable ie task performance. As for the relationship between work plateau and task performance, the results of regression analysis show that work plateau can significantly explain as much as 43% of the variance in the dependent variable ( $R^2=.043$ ,  $F(2,318) = 8.18$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). It can be seen that the work plateau shows a significant influence based on the  $\beta$  value for the work plateau is 0.210 and the value of  $t=3.823$  and  $Sig=0.000$  ( $\beta=0.210$ ,  $t=3.823$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Therefore, the researcher can confirm that the work plateau has an impact or effect on the achievement of task performance among employees in the methanol company.

The result of the first hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) contradicts and does not support the previous study by Wang et al. (2020) who found that job boredom mediates the relationship between work plateau and task performance, coupled with the lack of organizational support making this relationship horizontal. When employees or staff feel that their work tasks are no longer challenging, they are more likely to experience boredom, which in turn reduces their job performance. Furthermore, according to Yang et al. (2019) the main cause of work plateau is boring or routine work that hinders the development and growth of the individual. In this study, the researcher found that the work plateau and task performance have a good relationship but are different because each involves the work affairs and tasks of an employee. In the production department at the methanol company, the staff especially the technicians face high routine work if a person works in the same unit and section despite having different work grades. This is because the nature of work for process technicians is almost the same every day. After all, a technician must carry out routine work such as taking equipment readings and also taking water and gas samples every day unless there is an upset or shutdown. The researcher found that the positive relationship between work plateau and task performance is because employees in

the methanol company still care about self-performance even though they do routine work that is boring or unchallenging for some. It can be seen when there is a weak but significant positive relationship in this variable.

Hierarchy plateau and task performance indicated a relationship that is not significant negatively but at a very weak level ( $r=-0.072$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) with task performance while multiple regression analysis is used to test whether the independent variable, which is the hierarchical plateau, can significantly predict the dependent variable, which is task performance. For the relationship between the hierarchical plateau and task performance, the results of the regression analysis show that the hierarchical plateau can explain as much as 43% of the variance in the dependent variable ( $R^2=0.043$ ,  $F(2,318) = 8.18$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, it can be seen that the hierarchical plateau does not show a significant influence based on the  $\beta$  value for the hierarchical plateau obtained, which is  $.054$  and the value of  $t=-0.054$  and  $Sig=0.326$  ( $\beta=0.054$ ,  $t=-0.054$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Therefore, the researcher can confirm that the hierarchical plateau has no impact or effect on the achievement of task performance among employees in the methanol company.

The results of the study found that the second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) or hierarchical plateau has a non-significant relationship with contextual performance because the Sig value has passed the significant level of 0.05 in the Pearson correlation analysis ( $r=0.197$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and the Sig value of 0.326 from the multiple regression analysis ( $\beta=0.054$ ,  $t=-0.054$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) both exceeded the 0.05 significance level. Thus, the researcher concludes that there is a negative relationship between the hierarchical plateau and task performance. This finding is supported by previous studies: Milliman (1992); Ettington (1997) and Ettington (1998) found that subjectively measured hierarchical plateaus were negatively associated with managers' performance evaluations. Similarly, Orpen (1986) reported no difference in self-rated work performance between groups, but hierarchically plateaued managers received lower supervisor-rated work performance compared to non-plateaued managers. In addition, Lemire et al. (1999) also found that hierarchical plateaus were negatively associated with job performance. However, the findings of this study also contradict previous studies that say the hierarchical plateau has an impact and also an effect on task performance. The study referred to by the previous researcher is from Orpen (1983) who focuses on a person's service period, changes in power or rank, and a person's responsibilities also affect performance. An explanation that can be considered for the findings of this study is that the higher a person is plateaued hierarchically, the more the task performance or work performance of a person decreases.

Work plateau and contextual performance indicated a positive significant relationship but at a weak level ( $r=0.366$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with contextual performance while multiple regression analysis is used to test whether the variable the independent variable that is work plateau can significantly predict the dependent variable that is contextual performance. As for the relationship between the work plateau and contextual performance, the results of the regression analysis show that the work plateau can significantly explain 13% of the variance in the dependent variable ( $R^2=0.130$ ,  $F(2,318) = 24.801$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). It can be seen that the work plateau shows a significant influence based on the  $\beta$  value for the work plateau is 0.362 and the value of  $t=6.898$  and  $Sig=0.000$  ( $\beta=0.362$ ,  $t=6.898$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Therefore, the researcher can confirm that the work plateau has an impact or effect on the achievement of contextual performance among employees in the methanol company.

However, the results of the third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) are contradictory and do not support previous studies such as Feldman and Brett (1983) stating that they may not succeed in achieving task mastery which in turn will have little effect on contextual performance. In addition, Hurst et al. (2017) also stated a negative relationship between work plateau and organizational citizenship behavior as a performance proxy indicator. Likewise, Li et al. (2010) and Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) found that work plateau has a negative relationship with the behavior of helping employees as well as being involved in helping others in the organization which is a form of contextual performance. Hurst et al. (2017) also observed a negative relationship between work plateau and organizational citizenship behavior as a proxy indicator of performance. An explanation that can be considered on the findings of this study is that the staff at the methanol company are seen to show a positive relationship between the work plateau and contextual performance because despite facing routine work and lack of responsibility they still care about a harmonious

atmosphere where employees in the methanol company still choose to help each other others as well as highlighting voluntary behavior with each other.

Hierarchy plateau and contextual performance indicated a relationship that is not significant negatively but at a very weak level ( $r=-0.074$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) with contextual performance while multiple regression analysis is used to test whether the independent variable that is the hierarchical plateau can significantly predict the dependent variable that is the contextual performance. For the relationship between the hierarchical plateau and contextual performance, the results of the regression analysis show that the hierarchical plateau can explain as much as 13% of the variance in the dependent variable ( $R^2=0.130$ ,  $F(2,318) = 24.801$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, it can be seen that the hierarchical plateau does not show a significant influence based on the  $\beta$  value for the hierarchical plateau obtained, which is  $-0.043$  and the value of  $t=-0.815$  and  $Sig=0.416$  ( $\beta=-0.043$ ,  $t=-0.815$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Therefore, the researcher can confirm that the hierarchical plateau has no impact or effect on the achievement of contextual performance among employees in the methanol company.

The results of the study found that the fourth hypothesis ( $H_4$ ), the hierarchical plateau has a non-significant relationship with contextual performance because the Sig value has passed the significant level of 0.05 in the Pearson correlation analysis ( $r=0.186$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) as well as the Sig value= $0.416$  obtained in multiple regression analysis has also exceeded the 0.05 significance level ( $\beta=-0.043$ ,  $t=-0.815$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Therefore, the researcher concludes that there is a negative relationship between the hierarchical plateau and contextual performance. This finding aligns with previous studies: [Chay et al. \(1995\)](#) found that hierarchical plateaus were negatively related to extra-role behavior (i.e., seeking additional responsibilities), but not to in-role behavior (i.e., managing assigned tasks). [Lemire et al. \(1999\)](#) reported that hierarchical plateaus were negatively associated with job performance. Additionally, [Gerpott and Domsch \(1987\)](#) studied R&D professionals and found that hierarchically plateaued individuals had lower self-rated work performance and objective productivity (number of publications) compared to their non-plateaued counterparts than their non-plateaued peers. An explanation that can be considered on the findings of this study is that employees who are plateaued tend not to care about others and their behavior is only focused on their work alone apart from their lack of contribution to the organization's objectives and goals.

### 5.1. Implications of the Study

Work performance will translate to organizational performance. This can be seen when the productivity of an organization is measured and made into a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for some departments or the organization itself. The results of this study have proven theoretically and also have a practical impact by presenting that the level of work performance among employees in the methanol company is influenced by career plateaus, if not curbed will hurt the organization, department, and the staff themselves. Empirical support for the theoretical relationship and research framework can be seen when this study has confirmed the relationship between work plateau and work performance. This study also touches on and sheds light on understanding the relationship between career plateaus and work performance. There are four findings or results in this study that will contribute to the existing literature. The first and second are that the work plateau has a positive influence on task performance and contextual performance, while the hierarchical plateau does not influence task performance or contextual performance.

The findings of this study are expected to provide benefits to the parties involved, whether it is the management of the methanol company or its employees. This finding can provide the information and exposure needed to further improve the quality of work performance for staff in the energy sector as well as in the oil and gas sector. In addition, the parties concerned can assess the extent of effectiveness between the two variables that have been studied. In this regard, staff needs to be careful in avoiding the occurrence of career plateaus themselves, while the management should take responsibility if there is a decline in work performance due to career plateaus.

Finally, the findings of this study are also hoped to be used as a guide and reference for the parties involved including management, employers, staff, and group organizations as well as organizations in the same sector. In

addition, the findings of this study are also expected to contribute ideas about plateau careers and work performance to those who need to see the relationship between these two variables can provide improvements to the organization to contribute to more efficient human resource management, especially in maintaining a performance work culture. high among employees in the methanol company.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

There are several limitations along with recommendations that are advanced by researchers to future researchers. Next, this chapter discusses the results of the study. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the work plateau affects both work performance, i.e. task performance and contextual performance among employees in the methanol company, while the hierarchical plateau does not have an impact or effect on work performance. The problem of the quality of work performance is a problem that needs to be paid attention to by the management or the organization. The management should introduce better methods and find alternatives that can overcome staff problems. Finally, the researcher hopes that this study can provide benefits, references, and contribution of ideas to those in need, especially the parties involved as well as to future researchers as a reference.

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