

Career Plateau and Employee Outcomes: Evidence on Job Satisfaction, Performance, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study investigates the impact of career plateau (CP) on job satisfaction (KK), employee performance (KP), and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) among higher education support staff. Additionally, it examines whether job satisfaction and OCB serve as mediators in these relationships.

Methodology: The study utilized a quantitative approach, employing Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 200 higher education staff members across multiple Indonesian institutions.

Findings: The results indicate that career plateau significantly reduces job satisfaction but does not directly influence employee performance or OCB. Job satisfaction enhances OCB, which, in turn, improves employee performance. Mediation analysis reveals that career plateau affects performance indirectly through a sequential pathway involving job satisfaction and OCB.

Conclusion: Career plateau primarily affects affective factors rather than directly influencing performance. Enhancing job satisfaction and fostering OCB are essential strategies to mitigate the negative consequences of career stagnation and improve staff performance in higher education.

Keywords: Career Plateau; Job Satisfaction; Organizational Citizenship Behavior; Employee Performance; SEM-PLS.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions increasingly depend on effective human resources to achieve sustainability, service quality, and strong performance. Although academic staff have been widely studied, educational support staff (*tenaga kependidikan*) remain underrepresented in research, despite their critical roles in administration, human resources, and operations. In Indonesia, their roles, qualifications, and professional development are regulated by Permendikbud No. 3 Tahun 2020, which sets minimum educational and competency standards. However, meeting these regulations does not guarantee effective career development or ongoing employee motivation.

Educational support staff face limited opportunities for career advancement. Universities often have rigid, hierarchical structures with few higher-level managerial positions. As a result, many employees encounter a career plateau, where further promotion is unlikely. This plateau reflects both limited promotion opportunities and a personal sense of career stagnation (Darling & Cunningham, 2023; Hu et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2023). The issue is especially pronounced in higher education, where non-academic career paths are often unclear and structurally limited.

Research consistently shows that a career plateau is associated with negative work outcomes. Employees experiencing a career plateau often report lower job satisfaction, higher stress, reduced motivation, and greater intentions to leave (Bedemariam & Ramos, 2021; Canivet et al., 2017; Kim & Choi, 2018). Those who feel stuck in their careers may also feel undervalued, which weakens their engagement and emotional connection to the organization (Kwon, 2022; Zhu et al., 2021). These effects are particularly concerning for higher education institutions, where employee attitudes and behaviors directly impact service quality and effectiveness.

Career plateau also affects discretionary behaviors, especially Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). OCB includes voluntary actions that support the organization, such as assisting colleagues, showing initiative, and fostering a positive work environment. Studies indicate that employees who frequently demonstrate OCB are more likely to receive positive evaluations and recognition (Saraih & Naiemah, 2015). OCB is closely linked to employees' emotional states, with job satisfaction recognized as a key factor that encourages these behaviors.

Recent studies show that the effects of career plateau on employees vary and are influenced by psychological factors. Tremblay (2021) finds that perceived career plateau can lead to negative thoughts and emotions about the job and the organization, reducing motivation and performance. In contrast, Yang et al. (2019) show that affective commitment and supportive environments can lessen these negative effects. Xie et al. (2023) also note that affective commitment helps employees maintain positive attitudes despite limited mobility. Vleugels et al. (2018) highlight that changes in person–environment fit affect emotions and performance over time, stressing the need for psychological alignment even when career advancement is limited.

Despite the growing body of research on career plateau, several important gaps remain. Previous research has primarily focused on corporate or industrial contexts, thereby restricting the relevance of their findings to higher education settings. Research on educational support staff remains scarce despite their strategic role in organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, existing studies tend to examine career plateau effects in isolation, often overlooking the combined and sequential roles of job satisfaction and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) as underlying mechanisms. Consequently, the empirical understanding of how career

plateau influences employee performance through integrated psychological and behavioral pathways remains limited.

This study proposes an integrative framework linking career plateau, job satisfaction, OCB, and employee performance within the context of higher education support staff to address these gaps. Unlike prior research that emphasizes direct or fragmented relationships, this study adopts a process-based perspective by examining both direct and indirect pathways, including individual and sequential mediation effects. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of how career plateau operates as an antecedent of employee outcomes.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which are integrated into a single overarching framework. Employees reciprocate favorable organizational conditions from a social exchange perspective through positive attitudes and discretionary behaviors. However, when career stagnation is perceived, the exchange relationship weakens, reducing engagement in extra-role behaviors, such as OCB. The conservation of resources theory explains that limited career growth represents a loss of valued resources, which reduces job satisfaction. This study conceptualizes career plateau as a stressor that initially reduces job satisfaction, subsequently weakens organisational citizenship behaviour, and ultimately impacts employee performance through a sequential process by combining these perspectives.

Accordingly, this study offers several contributions to the literature. The study contributes to the theoretical literature by developing a unified, process-oriented framework that integrates SET and COR to explain the indirect and sequential effects of career plateau on performance. Second, the findings emphasize the importance of enhancing job satisfaction and fostering OCB to mitigate the negative consequences of career stagnation from a practical perspective. Third, from a policy perspective, the study highlights the need for structured career development systems and performance management practices that incorporate psychological and behavioral indicators, particularly in higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career development has long been recognized as a critical issue in human resources management, as it influences employees' attitudes, behaviors, and long-term performance. Career plateau, a condition in which individuals perceive limited opportunities for advancement or professional growth, is a widely discussed career-related phenomenon. Huo & Jiang (2023) and Tremblay (2021) define a career plateau as the point at which career advancement within the organizational hierarchy becomes unlikely, usually due to structural constraints such as rigid hierarchies and a scarcity of senior positions. Farivar et al. (2024) differentiate between vertical career plateaus, marked by a lack of advancement opportunities, and horizontal career plateaus, in which employees remain in the same position but may still acquire new skills or expand their roles. Empirical evidence suggests that vertical career plateau is strongly associated with negative psychological and behavioral outcomes (Bai et al., 2023; Ng & Yang, 2024).

Recent research underscores that a career plateau is best conceptualized as a subjective perception rather than solely an objective career condition. Employees' perceptions of stagnation play a critical role in shaping their affective and behavioral responses at work (Darling & Cunningham, 2023; Hu et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2023).. People who feel that their careers are not progressing are more likely to feel frustrated, less motivated, and disconnected. Job satisfaction is one of the most consistently identified career plateau attitudinal consequences. Job satisfaction refers to a positive emotional state resulting from an individual's

job experience evaluation (Nugroho & Tanuwijaya, 2022; Sabharwal et al., 2024). According to Herzberg's two-factor theory, unmet growth and recognition needs, which are central to career advancement, constitute key sources of dissatisfaction.

Empirical studies have consistently identified a negative relationship between career plateau and job satisfaction. Tremblay (2021) demonstrated that perceived career stagnation elicits adverse cognitive and emotional reactions toward work and the organization, leading to lower job satisfaction. Similarly, Yang et al. (2019) reported that career plateau undermines job satisfaction and weakens affective commitment, thereby diminishing employees' attachment to the organization. Xie et al. (2015), employees experiencing a career plateau are more susceptible to stress and emotional exhaustion, particularly when dissatisfaction persists over time. Drawing on these theoretical and empirical insights, this study proposes that career plateau significantly affects job satisfaction.

H1: Career plateau (CP) significantly affects job satisfaction (KK)

In addition to attitudinal outcomes, career plateau is anticipated to influence employee performance, defined as the extent to which individuals effectively fulfill work responsibilities and contribute to organizational objectives. Bhardwaj & Kalia (2021) and Feng et al. (2022) distinguish between task performance, which involves core job duties, and contextual performance, which encompasses behaviors that support the organizational environment. A career plateau may impair performance by diminishing motivation, engagement, and persistence in task execution. Ng & Yang (2024) contend that employees who perceive limited career prospects are more likely to disengage psychologically, potentially resulting in declining performance over time. Kwon (2022) similarly finds that feelings of being undervalued due to career stagnation reduce employees' willingness to exert discretionary effort. Therefore, this study proposes that career plateau significantly affects employee performance.

H2: Career plateau (CP) has a significant effect on employee performance (KP)

Beyond task-related outcomes, career plateau may also influence discretionary behaviors, particularly Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). OCB encompasses voluntary, extra-role behaviors that are not formally required but contribute to organizational effectiveness (Barton et al., 2018). Such behaviors include assisting colleagues, demonstrating conscientiousness, and supporting organizational initiatives. Recent research identifies OCB as a critical behavioral response to employees' perceptions of their work environment (Kao et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2024). Employees who perceive limited career opportunities may reduce their engagement in OCB, especially when additional effort is unlikely to lead to recognition or advancement. Tremblay (2021) provides empirical evidence that perceived career plateau is associated with lower levels of discretionary effort and organizational involvement. Consequently, this study proposes that career plateau significantly affects OCB.

H3: Career plateau (CP) has a significant effect on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Job satisfaction is widely recognized as a central determinant of employee performance. Satisfied employees typically exhibit higher motivation, stronger commitment, and greater persistence in completing tasks, which collectively enhance performance outcomes. Empirical studies in public and service-oriented organizations consistently report a positive relationship between job satisfaction and performance (Nugroho & Tanuwijaya, 2022; Sabharwal et al., 2024). In higher education institutions, where performance is closely associated with service quality and administrative effectiveness, job satisfaction is expected to play a particularly significant role.

H4: Job satisfaction (KK) has a significant effect on employee performance (KP).

Job satisfaction also serves as a key antecedent of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Employees who evaluate their work experiences positively tend to develop stronger feelings of reciprocity toward the organization, which manifests in discretionary behaviors beyond formal job requirements. While earlier studies by Saraih & Naiemah (2015) provide robust empirical foundations for the positive association between job satisfaction and OCB, more recent research reinforces and extends this relationship. Contemporary studies show that job satisfaction remains one of the most consistent predictors of OCB across organizational contexts, as satisfied employees are more willing to invest additional effort, assist colleagues, and support organizational functioning voluntarily (Ghasemy & Elwood, 2023; Hu et al., 2023; Tagliabue et al., 2020). From a social exchange perspective, positive work evaluations strengthen employees' sense of obligation to reciprocate, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in extra-role behaviors. Accordingly, this study proposes that job satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on OCB.

H₅: Job satisfaction (KK) has a significant effect on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), in turn, is expected to enhance employee performance. Although OCB is not formally prescribed or directly rewarded, it plays a crucial role in facilitating cooperation, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and creating a supportive work environment that enables employees to perform their tasks more effectively. By reducing coordination costs and fostering collective efficacy, OCB enhances both individual and unit-level performance. While seminal studies have consistently demonstrated a positive association between OCB and performance outcomes, more recent empirical evidence further confirms the robustness of this relationship across organizational contexts (Kao et al., 2023; Tagliabue et al., 2020). Contemporary research shows that OCB contributes to higher task efficiency, service quality, and adaptive performance, particularly in knowledge-intensive and public service organizations (Park et al., 2020; Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2020). These findings suggest that discretionary behaviors function as an important behavioral mechanism through which employees translate positive work attitudes into tangible performance outcomes. Accordingly, this study proposes that OCB has a significant and positive effect on employee performance.

H₆: Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) has a significant effect on employee performance (KP).

In addition to direct effects, recent literature increasingly emphasizes that the influence of career plateau on employee performance is predominantly indirect and unfolding through affective and behavioral mechanisms. Job satisfaction represents a central psychological pathway through which perceptions of career stagnation translate into work outcomes. Employees who experience limited career growth or advancement opportunities tend to report lower job satisfaction, reflecting diminished motivation, reduced work engagement, and weakened attachment to organizational goals. Contemporary studies confirm that such declines in job satisfaction are associated with reduced performance, particularly in contexts where performance depends on sustained motivation and discretionary effort (Katebi et al., 2022; Pinheiro & Palma-Moreira, 2025). These findings extend earlier evidence Yang et al. (2019) and Xie et al. (2023) by demonstrating that job satisfaction functions as a proximal affective mediator rather than a mere correlate of performance. Accordingly, this study proposes that career plateau indirectly affects employee performance by negatively affecting job satisfaction.

H₇: Job satisfaction (KK) mediates the relationship between career plateau (CP) and employee performance (KP).

Job satisfaction plays a critical mediating role in explaining how career plateau influences organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). When employees experience a career plateau, perceptions of stagnation and limited growth opportunities reduce their job satisfaction, which in turn weakens their willingness to engage in discretionary, extra-role behaviors. Recent studies consistently show that career plateau primarily affects affective states rather than behavior directly, positioning job satisfaction as a proximal psychological response to stagnation (Lee et al., 2025; Tremblay, 2021). In line with social exchange theory, lower job satisfaction diminishes employees' sense of reciprocity toward the organization, thereby reducing OCB, which is inherently voluntary and not formally rewarded (Gupta et al., 2026; Liu et al., 2023). Empirical evidence from recent Scopus-indexed studies further confirms that job satisfaction is one of the most consistent predictors of OCB, particularly in contexts where career advancement is constrained (Barokah et al., 2025; Na-Nan et al., 2020).

H₈: Job satisfaction (KK) mediates the relationship between career plateau (CP) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB).

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) constitutes an additional behavioral mechanism through which career plateau may influence employee performance. Employees who perceive career stagnation often experience reduced motivation to contribute beyond formal role requirements, leading to a decline in discretionary behaviors such as helping colleagues, sharing knowledge, and supporting organizational initiatives. This reduction in OCB indirectly undermines performance by weakening cooperation, increasing coordination costs, and diminishing collective effectiveness. While earlier evidence suggests that career plateau is associated with lower engagement in extra-role behaviors (Saraih & Naiemah, 2015), more recent studies reinforce the view that career-related frustrations primarily affect performance through behavioral withdrawal rather than direct task neglect. Contemporary research indicates that perceptions of stalled career progression are associated with lower OCB, which, in turn, constrains individual and unit-level performance outcomes, particularly in settings that rely on collaboration and mutual support (Hu et al., 2023; Tremblay, 2021). Accordingly, OCB is conceptualized as a key behavioral mediator that channels the indirect effects of career plateau on employee performance.

H₉: Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) mediates the relationship between career plateau (CP) and employee performance (KP).

Furthermore, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) may operate as a sequential mediation mechanism through which career plateau affects employee performance. When employees perceive career stagnation, their job satisfaction is likely to decline as an initial affective response. This reduced satisfaction subsequently weakens discretionary behaviors such as helping, cooperation, and proactive contribution, which are critical for sustaining high performance. In turn, diminished OCB limits the social and functional resources available within the organization, ultimately resulting in lower performance outcomes. Recent literature increasingly supports this serial mediation logic, emphasizing that the adverse consequences of career plateau unfold through a layered process involving affective depletion followed by behavioral withdrawal (Lee et al., 2025; Tremblay, 2021). This integrated pathway extends earlier findings by demonstrating that neither job satisfaction nor OCB alone fully captures the impact of career plateau; rather, their combined and sequential roles provide a more comprehensive explanation of how career stagnation undermines employee performance (Vleugels et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019).

H₁₀: Job satisfaction (KK) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) simultaneously mediate the relationship between career plateau (CP) and employee performance (KP).

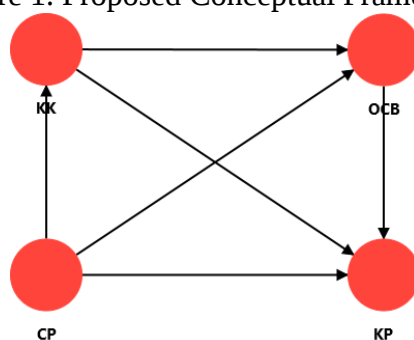
Finally, job satisfaction is expected to indirectly influence employee performance through organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Employees who experience high levels of job satisfaction tend to develop positive affective states and a stronger sense of reciprocity toward the organization, which motivates them to engage in discretionary behaviors that go beyond formal job requirements. These extra-role behaviors—such as helping colleagues, sharing knowledge, and supporting organizational initiatives—enhance coordination, cooperation, and overall work effectiveness, thereby improving performance outcomes. Recent studies consistently demonstrate that job satisfaction does not always translate directly into higher performance; rather, its effects are more pronounced when channeled through behavioral mechanisms such as OCB (Hu et al., 2023; Na-Nan et al., 2020). This perspective aligns with social exchange theory, which posits that satisfied employees reciprocate favorable work experiences through voluntary contributions that ultimately benefit performance. Accordingly, OCB is conceptualized as a critical mediator linking job satisfaction to employee performance. H₁₁: Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) mediates the relationship between job satisfaction (KK) and employee performance (KP).

METHOD

A quantitative research approach was employed to gather numerical data suitable for measurement, ranking, and categorization for statistical analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. This approach is appropriate given the objective of examining causal relationships among latent variables, including career plateau (CP), job satisfaction (KK), Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and employee performance (KP), and of estimating both direct and indirect effects within a comprehensive theoretical framework. The research design is explanatory and cross-sectional, with data collected at a single point in time using a structured survey. This design facilitates systematic hypothesis testing and is widely used in organizational and human resource management research when investigating complex relational models.

The study population comprised educational support staff (non-academic employees) working in higher education institutions. This group was selected for their strategic role in supporting institutional operations and their frequent experience of limited career advancement opportunities, which makes them particularly relevant for examining career plateau phenomena. Purposive sampling was applied, with respondents selected based on predefined criteria: full-time employment as educational support staff, a minimum tenure of one year, and direct involvement in administrative or operational functions. These criteria ensured that respondents possessed sufficient organizational experience to meaningfully evaluate their career conditions, job satisfaction, discretionary behaviors, and performance.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework



Data collection was conducted using a self-administered structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' perceptions of the study variables. Measurement instruments were adapted from well-established, validated scales used in prior empirical studies to ensure content validity and comparability with the existing literature. Career plateau was measured using items reflecting perceived stagnation in promotion opportunities and career development. Job satisfaction was assessed using indicators of overall job satisfaction, recognition, and opportunities for growth. Organizational Citizenship Behavior was evaluated using items capturing discretionary behaviors such as helping colleagues, demonstrating initiative, and supporting organizational objectives. Employee performance was measured using self-reported indicators related to task completion, work quality, and effectiveness. All items utilized a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), which is appropriate for capturing attitudinal and behavioral perceptions in organizational research.

The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with specialized software such as SmartPLS. PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for complex research models involving multiple latent constructs and mediation effects, its lack of strict requirements for multivariate normality, and its effectiveness for prediction-oriented and theory-development research. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, and convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis to ensure that each construct was empirically distinct.

The structural model was then assessed to test the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. Path coefficients were estimated to determine the strength and direction of relationships, and their statistical significance was evaluated using a bootstrapping procedure with a large number of resamples. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the model's explanatory power, while effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) were examined to evaluate the contribution and predictive capability of each exogenous construct. Mediation effects were tested by analyzing the significance of indirect paths, thereby determining whether job satisfaction and Organizational Citizenship Behavior function as mediators, both individually and simultaneously, in the relationship between career plateau and employee performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, the study involved 200 respondents, with a slightly higher proportion of females (52.0%) than males (48.0%). The majority of respondents were aged 25–35 years (45.0%), followed by those aged 45+ (27.5%), indicating that most participants were in productive and senior working-age groups. Regarding educational attainment, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (63.0%), while 20.5% had completed postgraduate education (master's or doctoral degrees).

Regarding employment characteristics, the largest group consisted of permanent foundation employees (34.0%), followed by civil servants (PNS/PPPK) at 25.0% and contract or honorary staff at 19.5%. Nearly half of the respondents (44.0%) reported more than 10 years of work experience, suggesting a highly experienced workforce. Most respondents were employed at public universities (60.0%), with the remaining 40.0% working at private

universities. Geographically, respondents were predominantly located in Java (67.5%), while 32.5% were distributed across regions outside Java.

Table 1. Respondent Demography

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Male	96 (48.0)
	Female	104 (52.0)
Age (years)	< 25	13 (6.5)
	25–35	90 (45.0)
	36–45	42 (21.0)
	> 45	55 (27.5)
	≤ Diploma	33 (16.5)
Education Level	Bachelor (S1)	126 (63.0)
	≥ Master (S2–S3)	41 (20.5)
Employment Status	Permanent (Foundation)	68 (34.0)
	Civil Servant (PNS/PPPK)	50 (25.0)
	Contract/Honorary	39 (19.5)
	Others	43 (21.5)
Work Experience	≤ 5 years	75 (37.5)
	6–10 years	37 (18.5)
	> 10 years	88 (44.0)
Institution Type	Public University (PTN)	120 (60.0)
	Private University (PTS)	80 (40.0)
Work Region	Java	135 (67.5)
	Outside Java	65 (32.5)

The quality of the measurement model was first assessed for reliability and convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, all constructs exhibit strong indicator reliability, with outer loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Internal consistency reliability is well established, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values above 0.70 for all constructs. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) values range from 0.703 to 0.791, confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Career Plateau (CP)	CP1	0.878	0.851	0.910	0.771
	CP2	0.900			
	CP3	0.856			
Job Satisfaction (KK)	KK1	0.852	0.867	0.919	0.791
	KK2	0.896			
	KK3	0.919			
Employee Performance (KP)	KP1	0.860	0.897	0.928	0.764
	KP2	0.891			
	KP3	0.855			
	KP4	0.890			
OCB	OCB1	0.834	0.789	0.877	0.703
	OCB2	0.823			
	OCB3	0.858			

Note: All loadings > 0.70; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE > 0.50.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). As reported in Table 3 (Panel A), the square root of AVE for each construct is higher than its correlations with other constructs, indicating clear construct separation. This result is further supported by HTMT values ranging from 0.117 to 0.718 (Table

3, Panel B), all of which fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85. Together, these findings confirm that the constructs are empirically distinct and free from conceptual overlap.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Panel A. Fornell–Larcker Criterion				
Construct	CP	KK	KP	OCB
CP	0.878			
KK	-0.392	0.889		
KP	-0.078	0.372	0.874	
OCB	-0.103	0.490	0.606	0.838
Panel B. HTMT				
HTMT Range			Result	
Minimum			0.117	
Maximum			0.718	

Note: $\sqrt{\text{AVE}} > \text{inter-construct correlations}$; HTMT < 0.85.

The structural model evaluation is summarized in Table 4. The coefficients of determination indicate that the model explains 15.3% of the variance in job satisfaction, 24.9% in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and 37.5% in employee performance. Effect size analysis reveals that career plateau has a moderate effect on job satisfaction ($f^2 = 0.181$) but a negligible effect on employee performance and OCB. In contrast, job satisfaction demonstrates a substantial influence on OCB ($f^2 = 0.317$), while OCB exerts the strongest effect on employee performance ($f^2 = 0.371$). The overall goodness-of-fit (GoF = 0.443) indicates strong model fit, supporting the robustness of the proposed PLS-SEM model.

Table 4. Structural Model Results

Path	f^2	Effect	R^2 (Endogenous)
CP → KK	0.181	Medium	KK = 0.153
CP → KP	0.001	Negligible	KP = 0.375
CP → OCB	0.012	Small	OCB = 0.249
KK → KP	0.012	Small	
KK → OCB	0.317	Medium–Large	
OCB → KP	0.371	Large	
Goodness of Fit (GoF)	0.443	Large fit	

Discussion

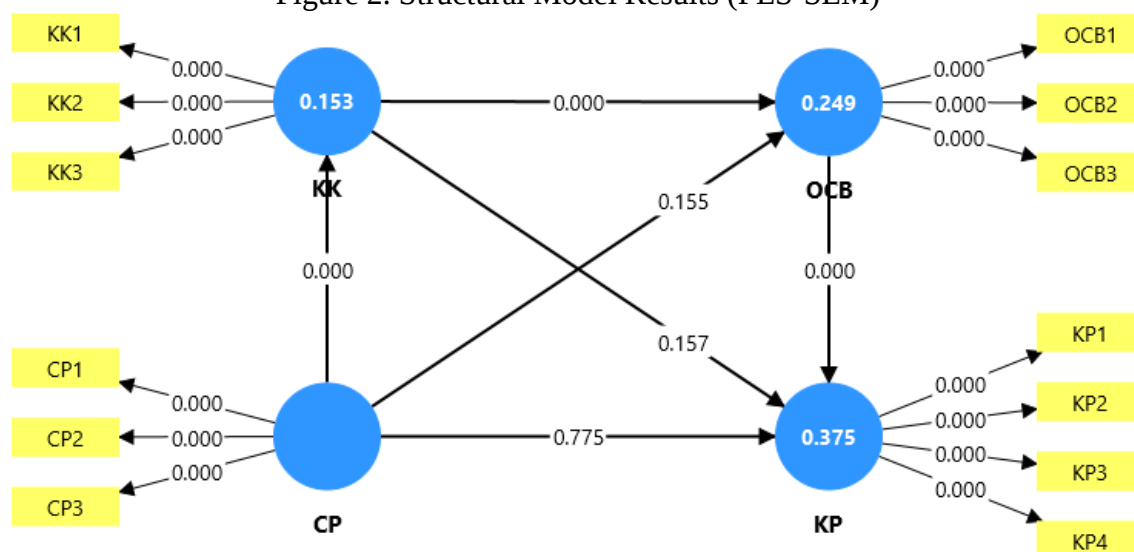
This study advances the understanding of career plateau by demonstrating that its influence on employee outcomes is predominantly indirect and unfolds through intertwined affective and behavioral mechanisms. The finding that career plateau significantly reduces job satisfaction (H_1) while exerting no direct effect on employee performance or organizational citizenship behavior (H_2 and H_3) reinforces the view that career plateau functions primarily as an affective stressor rather than an immediate performance inhibitor. Recent literature increasingly conceptualizes career plateau as a subjective perception of stagnation that erodes psychological resources and work-related attitudes before manifesting in observable behavior (Lee et al., 2025; Tremblay, 2021). From a theoretical perspective, this challenges linear cause–and–effect models and supports process-oriented frameworks that emphasize psychological mediation and resource depletion.

The absence of a direct relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance (H_4) further corroborates contemporary meta-analytic and longitudinal evidence suggesting that satisfaction alone is insufficient to generate performance gains (Judge et al., 2001; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Instead, job satisfaction emerges as a critical antecedent of discretionary behavior.

The strong support for H₅ confirms that satisfied employees are more likely to engage in OCB, consistent with social exchange theory and conservation of resources perspectives, which posit that positive work evaluations foster reciprocal and prosocial behaviors (Liu et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2024). In turn, the robust relationship between OCB and employee performance (H₆) underscores the central role of extra-role behavior in enhancing coordination, cooperation, and collective efficiency, particularly in complex and knowledge-intensive organizations (Kao et al., 2023; Thao et al., 2024; Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2020).

The mediation results provide deeper insight into the mechanisms through which career plateau affects performance. The lack of support for H₇ and H₉ indicates that neither job satisfaction nor OCB alone is sufficient to transmit the effects of career plateau to performance. This finding aligns with recent arguments that affective reactions and behavioral responses often operate jointly rather than independently in shaping performance outcomes (Pal et al., 2025; Shen et al., 2014). However, the significant indirect effect of career plateau on OCB through job satisfaction (H₈) highlights job satisfaction as a pivotal psychological conduit linking career-related perceptions to discretionary behavior. Empirical studies increasingly show that when satisfaction deteriorates, employees selectively withdraw from voluntary contributions while maintaining minimum task performance (Hu et al., 2023; Sabharwal et al., 2024; Vercic, 2021).

Figure 2. Structural Model Results (PLS-SEM)



More importantly, the confirmation of serial mediation (H₁₀) reveals a layered and temporally plausible mechanism through which career plateau undermines performance. Career stagnation first diminishes job satisfaction, reduced satisfaction subsequently weakens OCB, and the erosion of OCB ultimately leads to lower performance. This finding extends earlier conceptual work by empirically validating a sequential affective-behavioral pathway (Vleugels et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019). From an organizational policy perspective, this suggests that systems relying solely on output indicators may overlook early warning signs of career plateau. Integrating satisfaction diagnostics and OCB indicators into performance management systems may therefore enable more preventive and sustainable workforce governance, especially in public institutions and higher education settings.

Table 5. Structural Model Results: Direct Effects

	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
CP -> KK	-0.392	-0.396	0.078	5.018	0.000
CP -> KP	0.021	0.014	0.075	0.285	0.775
CP -> OCB	0.105	0.097	0.073	1.424	0.155
KK -> KP	0.108	0.103	0.076	1.415	0.157
KK -> OCB	0.531	0.526	0.086	6.179	0.000
OCB -> KP	0.555	0.552	0.079	7.003	0.000

Finally, the significant indirect effect of job satisfaction on performance via OCB (H_{11}) reinforces the strategic importance of OCB as both a behavioral outcome and a performance-enhancing mechanism. Recent studies emphasize that job satisfaction contributes to performance primarily when it is translated into proactive and cooperative behaviors rather than through direct motivational effects (Dust et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2023; Tupti & Lestari, 2021). Accordingly, organizations should formally recognize and reward discretionary behaviors, embedding OCB-related criteria into appraisal, promotion, and career development systems to align employee well-being with long-term organizational effectiveness.

Table 6. Structural Model Results: Indirect Effects

	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
CP -> KK -> KP	-0.042	-0.040	0.031	1.345	0.179
CP -> KK -> OCB	-0.208	-0.205	0.043	4.863	0.000
CP -> OCB -> KP	0.058	0.056	0.045	1.294	0.196
CP -> KK -> OCB -> KP	-0.115	-0.113	0.026	4.403	0.000
KK -> OCB -> KP	0.295	0.291	0.067	4.404	0.000

CONCLUSION

This study examined how career plateau affects employee performance by considering the mediating roles of job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Addressing inconsistencies in prior research, this study adopted a process-oriented approach to clarify whether the effects of career plateau on performance are direct or indirect.

The findings show that career plateau significantly reduces job satisfaction but does not directly influence employee performance or OCB. Instead, job satisfaction and OCB function as key mechanisms linking career plateau to performance outcomes. Job satisfaction positively influences OCB, and OCB emerges as the strongest predictor of employee performance. Importantly, the results confirm a serial mediation pathway in which career plateau lowers job satisfaction, reduced satisfaction weakens OCB, and diminished OCB ultimately leads to lower performance.

These findings advance theory by positioning career plateau as an affective stressor whose consequences unfold through sequential psychological and behavioral processes. Practically, the results suggest that organizations should adopt integrated career management strategies that prioritize employee satisfaction and encourage discretionary behaviors to sustain performance. Future research should incorporate additional psychological and contextual variables and employ longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of career plateau and enhance the generalizability of these findings.

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