

MID-CAREER MALAISE: WHY WE EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Information Age is causing information rage. As a nation we are seeing the increasing need to manage and process more and more information in our day-to-day working lives. This requirement is adding not only to the personal stress of our workers, but is also impacting on both the quality and quantity of the work created. They feel ungrateful and disappointed with themselves particularly because their discontent seems so unjustified-which creates a potentially vicious circle. Analyzing a nation-wide problem the researcher found providing insights that might help people and firms to better handle these painful and costly episodes called mid-career crisis. A mid-career crisis can happen to anyone. It can hit even those who objectively have the most fulfilling jobs. When it does, it inflicts pain on the individual, and causes productivity losses for employers. Yet the phenomenon remains stigmatized and under-researched, leaving crucial questions unanswered. What are the causes? Why does this malaise seem to strike in midlife? And how can those who are stuck in its grips shake themselves loose?

Key Words: Mid-Career Crisis, Mid-Career Malaise, Career Fatigue, U-Shape Curve.

INTRODUCTION

Mid-career crises seem to be part of a natural development process, driven by biological rather than the specifics of a particular job. A mid-career crisis is also known as 'career fatigue'. This usually appears at a time in one's career when performing on the job is longer a self-driven act. The job does not remain exciting and there is nothing to look forward to in terms of advancements or compensation. In many cases, this stage usually strikes when people are close to mid-40 of age. However, age is not the only reason for this crisis. There are many different reasons as to why people experience it. Like any individual in real life, people are not comfortable handling some challenges and tasks. There could be many things troubling an individual, like emotional, psychological or financial. He/she can also feel bad when the job is routine-like, or the compensation is poor or the current job is worse than the previous job.

Midlife crisis = Dreams/Reality + Wrinkles. How do you know when it's time to move on and or what kind of job is for you?

- Is an inner voice persistently telling you that it's time for change, no matter how you try to ignore it?
- Do you look back on your career and think, my career so far has been a good run, but I'm ready for a change.
- Are you running in circles to keep up with your job-and feeling unfulfilled?
- Do you wake up wondering? I don't want to do this work for another week, let alone the rest of my life?
- Have you reached a point in your life where you want work to be more meaningful?
- Have you decided it's time for more work-life balance?

What is U-Curve in Career?

A U-shape curve in career can be defined as wave like fluctuations or career activity characterized by the phases: honeymoon phase, crisis phase, recovery phase and adjustment phase. U-curve occurs across the entire socio-economic spectrum, hitting senior-level executives as well as blue-collar workers and stay-at-home parents. It affects childless couples as well as single people or parents of four. In short, a mid-career crisis does not discriminate. The researcher explains the U-Curve in career in the following stages:



1. **Mid 30's:** On average, life satisfaction is high when people are young. It turns out and is overly optimistic, expecting significant increases in life satisfaction.

2. **Mid 40's:** Job satisfaction of the average employee deteriorates dramatically in midlife and anticipating the slide down the U-curve. Starts to decline, bottoming out and are the unhappiest, citing career anxiety, career unease, worker stress, loneliness and relationship troubles and careers stalls.

3. **Mid 50's:** Increasing again to levels as high as during young adulthood. But in the second half of people's working lives, job satisfaction increases again, in many cases reaching even higher levels than earlier in the career-essentially forming a U-shaped curve.

REASONS/CAUSES BEHIND CAREER CRISIS

There could be many reasons for which a mid-career crisis can take place. Career experts say the following could apply:

1. **Competency obsolescence:** Many executives struggle to adjust to a new way of doing things and manage the waves of information and knowledge in the economy. Many of them expect promotions based on the length of service or diligence and they lose focus on how to continuously upgrade knowledge, skills and competencies in this dynamic and ever changing environment.
2. **Limited opportunities for progression:** People are competing for too few leadership positions in any particular organisation that have been shedding layers of hierarchy. Furthermore, job security is one of the biggest concerns for managers in their forties and fifties.
3. **Inequality factor:** Enormous compensation gaps between the top most executives and almost all other employees in the organisation create frustration and triggers a strong reaction when employees feel that the pay hike is not aligned with contribution and non-relevant factors are playing a big role.
4. **Stressed out:** Employees who have been career driven for 20 years or more are usually stretched and stressed. They find their work unexciting or repetitive, and are running low on energy and the ability to cope.
5. **Role disappointment:** For employees, the job should be meaningful where they can directly see their contribution turning into organizational success. In an absence of this, it could create severe disengagement for them, resulting in mid-career crisis.
6. **Work/life tension:** Finding a balance between the work load and family commitments is another reason for a mid-career crisis. In many cases, this tension is unbearable.

MANAGING/OVERCOMING THE MID CAREER CRISIS

Career experts suggest organizations to deal with mid-career crisis with higher importance for the sustainable growth of the employees and the following are the few measures to overcome. An organisation should recognize this crisis as a reality and act positively. Otherwise, organizational performance would in-turn get affected.

1. **Review yourself:** It is important to understand employees' own strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, as well as review the career track and current role. Employee can even consider his/her dream job that will give the driving energy and passion. After summarizing the thoughts, it is better to consult a career experts or consultant to identify the career action plans and how to achieve them.
2. **Financial evaluation:** A risk and return calculation is crucial if employees intend to make drastic changes. We need to take a decision without putting our family at financial risks. Therefore, it is important to set realistic timelines for the desired action based on a financial evaluation.
3. **Engaging in fulfilling activities:** Employees need to be engaged in other activities apart from their job, especially activities that help them feel good. Feeling good about ourselves is the kick-off point for positive thinking and that always helps in handling difficult situations.
4. **Sharing:** In many cases, employees do not share their mid-career crisis with the concerned boss and other stakeholders. If an employee has a good relationship with the boss, it is better to share the matter with him/her. The

boss will be concerned about an employee, which can help establish an appropriate development plan for the employee to move ahead. Also, it is wise to share information with the other stakeholders as it will help them understand the situation. Furthermore, sharing information will assist in managing expectations.

5. **Set new career goal:** Finally, if an employee feels that there is no scope to grow in the present place; new career goals need to be established and such can be done at any juncture of the career. Age should not be a barrier and obviously, it will be hard but success will be achievable with strong willingness and passion.
6. **Re-orientation and re-skilling:** In case of a competency gap, it is suggested that employees looking for a change go through a re-orientation and re-skilling process, where they enroll for higher education programmes, training or a diploma. In this knowledge based economy, most skills have a very short shelf life and we must ensure re-orientation and re-skilling wherever necessary. It helps enhance employee capabilities to handle future demand.

To avoid the mid-career fatigue the researcher observes and suggests the following recommendations:

1. Focus should be put more on enhancing the mental health and updating the competencies of the employees rather than blaming them for lowering the efficiency level and calling them 'carried passengers'.
2. The organizations should introduce coaching and career counselling services for their staff to negate the causes of worry among employees.
3. The responsibility for preventing a mid-career crisis lies with both the employer and staff. So, the organizations must think of career development by offering mentoring programmes and expanding or redesigning job descriptions to generate new prospects for one's professional.
4. Organizations must be proactive in supporting employees and professionals. Fresh assignments and challenging cross-functional projects can be given to executives and it will introduce a new dimension for them.
5. In addition, job rotation must be present to create a sense of excitement about the work. Organizations need to create a life-long environment of learning for the employees, which will ensure skill development to meet current and future needs.
6. Human resource professionals have to play a crucial role in helping employees avoid career fatigue. They should engage employees in work through effective performance management processes and coaching tools.
7. Careerists argue that if employees are able to understand what the expected targets for their roles are and receive regular feedback and coaching to review their progress, it will certainly help them to take proactive actions to develop their skills.

In absence of this, it creates only ambiguity and it makes a large group of the workforce incompetent in facing future challenges.

CONCLUSION

While a mid-career crisis can be a painful time in life, it can also be an opportunity to reflect and to reevaluate personal strengths and weaknesses. Whether you choose to wait out the discontent, or make a drastic change in the hopes of a brighter tomorrow, rest assured that this too shall pass. Take heart if you find yourself in the depths of this U-shaped curve, because things can only look up from here.

A mid-career crisis can be taken as a wake-up call. It does not mean that we need to change our career immediately, which can be an option at a later stage, if necessary. At the firm level, HR could create mid-career mentoring programs. Mentoring is usually directed at early career stages and continues only informally through the rest of the career. My findings suggest that those in a mid-career low can learn from their older colleagues who already went through the valley and have emerged feeling less regret, having adapted to life's circumstances. A corporate culture that openly addresses mid-career discontent could support employees in this reorientation process, helping them explore new opportunities-within the firm.

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