



Goodbye mid-career crisis

SUMAN SAHA

THIRTY six year old Abir Hossain is unhappy with his career. As a senior bank executive, he now finds his work uninteresting and monotonous.

He wants a change in his career path, but is afraid of the outcome of such a decision. At the same time, he has not really pin-pointed what he is exactly looking for. The more he ponders over it, the more confused he gets.

Sabbir Ahmed, a senior manager at a telecommunications company, is also anxious about his career.

He sees limited opportunity in moving to the next step of his career as there are a few leadership positions.

Ahmed, 38, is contemplating a change in organisation. But he is apprehensive because of job security.

If you are one of those people who are struggling to make career changes, you are in a mid-career crisis.

Switching an organisation is not the only solution. It is important to review the situation thoroughly before taking the leap, including whether making the decision is truly the best solution or not, say career experts.

"A mid career move is often harder than making a career change at an entry level position," says M Zulfikar Hussain, chief executive officer of Grow n Excel, a leading human resources and management consultation organisation in Bangladesh.

After working for 10-12 years, employees generally reach at a level where they are financially and socially stable, he adds.

Therefore, it requires proper assessment to avoid a costly decision, which will lead to peace, happiness and prosperity in the career, says Hussain.

"Changing jobs should be the last resort to address mid-career crisis, unless organisational growth is stunted and there is a redundancy situation," says NEA Shibly, chief executive officer of Pro-edge, a leading management and human resources consultation house in Bangladesh.

The crisis might crop up again at the new place unless the individual can really prove his/her ability to add value to the organisation, he adds.

So, Shibly urges senior professionals to identify their own deficiencies and try to improve those through updating their knowledge, skills and ability.

The Grow n Excel CEO says, "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." So he suggests the following steps to deal with the crisis.

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 summarising the thoughts, it is better to consult a career experts or consultant to identify the career action plans and how to achieve them.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 enrol 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.

Career experts also suggest organisations to deal with mid career crisis with higher importance for the sustainable growth of the employees.

"An organisation should recognise this crisis as a reality and act positively. Otherwise, organisational performance would in-turn get affected," says Shibly of Pro-edge.

He says focus should be put more on enhancing the mental health and updating the competencies of the employees rather than blaming them 'carried passengers'.

The organisations should introduce coaching and career counselling services for their staff to negate the causes of worry among employees, says Shibly.

"The responsibility for preventing a mid-career crisis lies with both the employer and staff," says Mohammed Tareq, head of human resources at Gems Logo Green Energy Management Services Ltd.

So, the organisations must think of career development by offering mentoring programmes and expanding or redesigning job descriptions to generate new prospects for one's professional growth and personal creativity, he adds.

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What's at the heart of the crisis?

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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 40 years 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.

Reasons behind a mid-career crisis

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

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.

Limited opportunities for progression:

People are competing for too few leadership positions in any particular organisation that have been shedding layers of hierarchy. Further-

more, job security is one of the biggest concerns for managers in their forties and fifties.

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.

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.

Role disappointment:

For employees, the job should be meaningful where they can directly see their contribution turning into organisational success. In an absence of this, it could create severe disengagement for them, resulting in mid career crisis.

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.

Present situation of corporate Bangladesh

At mid and senior levels, we often see frustration and dissatisfaction among employees. This is a common occurrence in the lives of middle-aged corporate employees in Bangladesh, as in other parts of the world too, say career experts.

"Perhaps, our problems are much deeper as we have other issues like corporate governance, stewardship and certainly, this creates additional challenges and a crisis for us," said a senior professional.

How to avoid the mid-career fatigue

Organisations 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.

In addition, job rotation must be present to create a sense of excitement about the work. Organisations need to create a life-long environment of learning for the employees, which will ensure skill development to meet current and future needs.

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.

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.

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