Concept Note: Career Transition and Emotional Intelligence at Workplace

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Abstract: With the rising demands of career and changing opportunities, employees are increasingly driven to shift or change their career/job profile. In the present situation, employees who have crossed mid-career path (more than 10 years of work) prefer to change their career options due to various organizational, psychological and personal issues. Often it is observed that they their satisfaction with life and job plays a major role in the mid-career-transition. It has also been observed that for an individual to shift/change their work profile, it is necessary for them to be emotionally sound. Emotionally intelligent people are more likely to undergo career change easily in comparison to less emotionally intelligent people.

This paper focuses on analysing how Mid-Career Transition and Emotional Intelligence are related to each other. It allows drawing a comparison between Mid-Career Transition and Emotional Intelligence and discovering the changing pattern of work performance. The paper intends to make use of information collected from secondary data sources.

1. Introduction

Career in today’s world is a continuous process of learning and development, as one gains experience in the world of work; they undertake a variety of life experiences and build their career path. Today, almost half of the employed persons are between the age of 35-54, and they represent the fastest growing segments of the workforce. Careers are increasingly driven by the altering skill demands of the fields in which a person works and thus by the need for the skills of adaptability and identity. People’s careers are becoming increasingly a succession of “mini-stages” (or short-cycle learning stages) of exploration-trial-mastery-exit, as they move in and out of various product areas, technologies, functions, organizations, and other work environments. The key issue determining a learning stage is not the chronological age (in which the 40s and 50s were “midcareer”) but career age, where perhaps 5 years in a given specialty may be “midlife” for that area.

Thus, the half-life of a career stage is driven by the half-life of the competency field of that career work.

According to Erickson’s developmental perspective, midlife revolves around a central theme of Generativity vs. Stagnation, and from a Gerontology perspective, it involves dynamic nature of changes in the middle years which can be represented as both gains and losses. Thus, mid-career is defined as a middle phase of an individual’s work life (Hall, 1986). It is being associated with crisis, break, and change. It is seen that mid-career employees often question their meaning for work, value for organization’s mission, their contributions and relationships.

Every individual during their lifespan opt for a career which helps in achieving the goals and to create a life- long progression in learning and in work. Their profession involves special training which helps in building a unique career path for them. Earlier the focus of careers was being in the organizational perspective, and a career has been considered as advancement corporate hierarchy. However lately the interest has shifted to that of the individual perspective and in changing work life, a career is understood as a wider process than mere vertical movement. Career management can be seen as an important part of managing intellectual capital and successful organizational career management entails awareness of career development stages and circumstances and mechanisms that influence career development. After a person, has found his or her place, he or she enters a new period, during which a person establishes itself professionally, and advances in a career. Approximately at the age of 40, a person reaches a mid-career period, a stage during which advancing in the organization is normally slow and most people enter a stage of maintaining the prevailing settings. For some people, however the mid-career period is a time of re-assessment, when accustomed behavior is questioned and a person re-evaluates his or her career choices and current alternatives to change course. Mid-Career transition occurs majorly during the mid-life of an individual. This period stretches from late 30’s to early 40’s. It is the time individuals reflect upon their lives and tend to bring about changes in their personal or
professional life. Mid-Career employees often question their work and their need of being in the organization. They tend to reflect upon themselves and their job decisions of choosing their career.

It can be seen that career transition is majorly related to change. Employees during this stage prefers to either shift to another job or shift to another position in the same organization. During a career phase an employee may feel that they have reached a plateau where they have mastered the current job. This results in bringing out a change in their present work environment. Many employees prefer career advancement rather than career change. During this stage employees tend to maintain their position in the face of competition and change, it is also necessary to keep themselves up to date with the current knowledge of their work field in order to avoid stagnation. Thus, it can be said that stability is very important during the transition phase of an employee. This can also be seen in the career transition cycle presented by both Lewin and Nicholson. In this representation of career transition, both focused upon stability and adaptation as an important factor leading to a successful transition. According to this, when a constant relationship between the individual and the new work environment is achieved, it leads to a period where a steady state can be formed which further leads to sustained performance and personal effectiveness.

There are many factors which lead to career transition. On the work front, bad choice of career in the beginning or changes within the organization can lead to career transition. Lack of challenges and monotonous work causes distress which leads to conflicting situation which further triggers occupational change in an employee. On the personal front, family expansion, peer pressures, financial crisis, death in family are also some of the reasons. Social network, self-identity and shocks are also some of the factors which lead to the career transition process.

These reasons lead to mid-career crisis leading to job switch, self-employment etc. this may also result in mind block and irritability towards work, lack of contribution, lack of identity, loss of lifestyle and poor punctuality. This causes increased stress and deteriorated health.

The theories of career development focused upon the evaluation of the lives of the employees and their values, modification of the current roles was necessary. It was important to change position according to what employees wish to achieve and hope. Satisfaction with one’s work was considered important for maintenance and stability and for the longevity of career in an organization. The focus was laid upon the work environment and its congruency with the personality of the employee, when individuals are able to understand self it also improves the decision-making ability and improves career transition. It was also suggested that having the perception about the transition helps in overcoming occupational change. Also, career counselling helps in the later stage of the lives it encourages the client to confront challenging situations of career transition.

Briefly, career transitions have been seen as a time of upheaval and disruption, is seen as an opportunity for learning and development, the passages amidst changed work roles, and the cycles of recurring adjustment periods. It also became evident that careers consist of periods of relative stability interspersed with periods of change surrounding career events. As a result of these periods of change, people adjust. Also, it was seen that a cyclic perspective of career transitions better serves to accentuate the dynamic nature of careers.

Thus, mid-career has many factors which initiate transition process in an employee. It reflects upon the organizational as well as the psychological factors which lead to transition. It is not necessary for it to occur, but the changing work culture, career opportunities, and increasing demands of the employees from themselves and from their respective organization is initiating the process of career transition the middle phase of an employee.

Our performance at work or the credentials we earn during our career are focused on the Intelligence Quotient (IQ), whereas Emotional Intelligence on the other hand focused on the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge to effectively promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Recent trends have indicated that these days, more employees are seeking opportunities to change their career or profession. There has been an increasing need for career that is more intrinsically motivated and individually meaningful. Change during mid-life career stage may have many reasons, such as intensity of the work, greater interest in the evolving professions and streams etc. Bringing a successful change at this stage of life has increased uncertainty. Therefore, having effective decision making skills and peaceful mind is very important, having a high emotional intelligence makes it easier for the employee to have a stress-free career change.

2. Conceptual Framework

Career can be described as an individuals’ journey through learning, work and other aspects of life. It is related to a range of aspects of an individual’s life, learning and work. It also frequently understands to relate only to the working aspects of an individual’s life. A third way in which the term career is used is to describe an occupation or a profession that usually involves special training or formal education, and is considered to be a person’s
lifework. In this case “a career” is seen as a sequence of related jobs usually pursued within a single industry or sector e.g. “a career in law” or “a career in the building trade”.

Levinson (1978) described the phase of midlife transition as a period stretching from late 30’s to early 40’s, which involve two fundamental tasks:

a.) A re-appraisal to one’s life as it is being lived, and

b.) A decision about whether to “stay the course” or shift to new patterns.

He reported most individuals have midlife crisis at this age of their life, he said it a period when, “every aspect of their lives comes into question, and they are horrified by much that is revealed” (Levinson, 1978).

According to Erikson, at each stage there is a crisis, in the sense of a transition or turning point. In midlife, the central theme is generativity versus stagnation. The associated tasks involve concern with producing, nurturing, and guiding the next generation. This includes not only raising offspring but also can apply to transmitting values, mentoring younger workers, or contributing to the world through art or literature. The multifaceted and multidimensional view of generativity in the domains of parenting and societal involvement reflects the critical role that commitment to others plays in the development of well-being in midlife (McAdams 2001, McAdams & de St. Aubin 1998). Midlife has also been guided by theories of lifespan development and aging (Staudinger & Bluck 2001). It is useful to view midlife in the context of the life course rather than as a disconnected entity. From a lifespan perspective, the dynamic nature of changes in the middle years can be represented as both gains and losses (Baltes 1987, Eichorn et al. 1981). The midlife experience is determined by both biological and cultural/environmental influences. In fact, midlife does not exist as a concept in all cultures (Shweder 1981).

One of the earliest studies to focus on midlife was the Kansas City Study of Adult Life, conducted from 1954 to 1964. This cross-sectional study was notable for integrating the psychological and social aspects of middle age and aging. The results showed personality and situational changes in adulthood and suggested that midlife was a time of peak functioning in psychosocial competence (Neugarten & Datan 1974).

The story of midlife is one of complexity, with the juxtaposition of peaks and valleys across the social, psychological, and physical domains. The need to balance multiple roles and manage the conflicts that arise is a reality that is characteristic of middle age, regardless of one’s specific lifestyle or circumstances.

2.1 CAREER TRANSITION

Career transition was studied by various career development practitioners as early as the 1950s (Super, Crites, Moses, Overstreet, & Warnath, 1957). With the 1960s and 1970s focus on self-fulfilment and individuality (Louis, 1980) as well as an economic downturn in the 1980s (Heppner, Fuller, & Multon, 1998), researchers paid closer attention to the concept of midlife career transition. Individuals considering midlife career transition seek greater balance or fulfillment in their lives (Murphy & Burck, 1976). Certain factors contributed to a successful transition, particularly family support and financial resources (Eby & Buch, 1995). The occurrence of mid-career is dependent on the career pattern. Mid-career is delineated by the midpoint of when an individual begins and ends a career experience. It may occur during the midlife falling between the ages of 40 to 60. Midlife and mid-career are coincident, because of the time required to gain mastery and since most professional careers begins when individuals have completed basic educational qualifications. “A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981).

2.2 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The term Emotional Intelligence was officially coined in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer Emotional Intelligence/Quotient is “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. Emotional intelligence is a new concept developed by Dr John Mayer and Dr Peter Salovey (1990) from American University. However, it was popularised by American Psychologist Daniel Goleman (1995). Emotional intelligence describes abilities distinct from, but complementary to, academic intelligence.”—Daniel Goleman (1998). It has been suggested by various researches that Intelligence Quotient can help you to be successful to the extent of 20 percent only, whereas 80% success is dependent upon the Emotional Quotient.

The application of emotional intelligence in the workplace is one of the most researched areas concerning the importance of application of emotional intelligence. Since the importance of EI first came into limelight in 1995, the construct of EI has gained stimulus in the applied and academic settings. Several programs have been designed and implemented to improve the EI of organizational leaders, while Universities throughout the U.S. have introduced courses in developing emotional
intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, 1997). However, many researchers have suggested that there is still need for more research to be done on this controversial topic.

There are many interpretations of this term and different researchers have come up with different definitions of it. The first description of the term, attributed to Peter and John Mayer, was developed in 1990. It defines emotional intelligence as “the capacity to reason about emotions, and emotions to enhance thinking, which includes the ability to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist, thought, in understanding emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer and Salovey, 1990 as quoted in 2004).

Daniel Goleman (1998), focussed on emotional intelligence having a wide array of competencies and skills that drive leadership performance, and consist of the following areas:

1. Self-awareness- The ability to recognize and understand personal moods and emotions and drives, as well as their effect on others.
2. Self-regulation- The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods, and the propensity to suspend judgment and to think before acting.
3. Internal motivation- A passion to work for internal reasons that go beyond money and status - which are external rewards - such as an inner vision of what is important in life, a joy in doing something, curiosity in learning, a flow that comes with being immersed in an activity. A propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence.
4. Empathy- The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people. A skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions.
5. Social skills- Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, and ability to find common ground and build rapport.

He emphasized that these basic competencies help people adapt all aspects of life. Emotional Intelligence has a wide impact on decision making and it controls the level of anxiety making it easier to effective make a decision. Thus, it is said that employees with high EQ are able to channel their emotions to a positive end. During mid-career stage, certain psychological factors play a major role, such as, stress, depression, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, frustration and career indecision. To sustain these factors, emotional intelligence plays an important role in regulating these factors.

2.3 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AT WORKPLACE

Advanced Emotional Intelligence is beneficial in many areas of life. However, the usefulness associated with its application is mostly documented in the area of professional workplace. According to Cherniss (2000), the workplace would be considered as a logical setting for the evaluation and improvement of emotional intelligence competencies for the following four reasons. First, EI competencies are vital for one to succeed in most jobs. Secondly, most of the adults join the workforce without the competencies essential to excel or succeed in a job. Thirdly, employers have already established motivation and means for providing the emotional intelligence training, and majority of the adults tend to spend most of their active hours at work. In the workplace setting, researchers have related emotional intelligence to increased success among employees of the same hierarchy level, for instance, senior managers. A strong importance of how emotional intelligence application, is crucial to separate the people involved into both the leaders or managers and the group members (Cherniss, 2000). Emotional Intelligence impacts both the leaders and the group members in the workplace environment.

2.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AT WORKPLACE

Some argue that EQ is more important in the work place than IQ. In the work place, there are constant interactions which are occurring among the people who work there. While some of these interactions are positive, others are negative. The key aspect, managers and company leaders must understand is that over time, each of these interactions will have a positive or negative effect on the company as a whole. The effect that these interactions have on the company will also have an effect on the company’s ability to remain competitive in its given market or industry. Thus, the key fact that must be considered in order to make these interactions more positive is emotional intelligence. Humans are emotional creatures, and this is the first key towards understanding EI. Just as it’s important to seek new hires with emotional intelligence, it’s vital for managers and other business leaders to operate in emotionally intelligent ways to meet the needs of today’s workers.

Emotional intelligence at work is about how people and relationships function:
- Relationships between colleagues, between directors and staff;
- Relationships between the organisation and its customers, stakeholders, suppliers, competitors, networking contacts, everyone.
It is about leadership, teamwork, management skills and partnership. Founded on excellent practice and understanding of communication, the emotionally intelligent business consistently excels in all these areas and has insight into how this happens.

An organisation which is emotionally intelligent has professionals that are:
- Motivated, productive, efficient, aligned with the business, and committed;
- Effective, confident, likable, happy, and rewarded.

Emotional intelligence is applicable to every human interaction in business: from staff motivation to customer service, from brainstorming to company presentations.

3. Conclusion

Every individual during their life-span of career opts for a career in order to achieve their desired goals of life to create a life-long progression in learning and in work. As per the interest area, skills achieved in past and alignment towards a specific job role one decided the career to future path. It has been seen and observed in various studies that when an individual reach to a stage of mid-career (more than 10 years of experience), their preferences and interest area is more likely to shift. With respect to the organizational, psychological and personal issues involved, the individual decides to shift/change or remain on the same course of their career. It is studied that when one attains a plateau at their workplace, the satisfaction level from both life and work starts diminishing. In order to attain stability, emotional intelligence plays an important role. With high emotional intelligence one can easily re-appraise their career and job decisions. Emotional Intelligence gives the ability to reason out about one’s emotions and it provides internal motivation and empathy to oneself to make the rightful decision.

4. References


