

Plight Of Mid Management Job Crisis After Covid Times

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the world forward into an unforeseen catastrophe and qualms leaving no individual, industry unaffected by this pandemic. This crisis has pushed India into a real risk of long-term unemployment. Mid-level or mid management constitutes the backbone of any organization and is the most stressed sector, proved the statistics. Mid-level or mid management workers has faced significant challenges on all front due to this crisis. There have several causes of job crisis in mid management workers, automation, difficult to change line of work, less pay and more use of AI is among few. Organizations and countries must act now so that this job crisis does not turn into a social crisis. International Organizations like ILO have also helped countries develop a response framework to combat the crisis. With the mid management being one of the worst effected due to this crisis, it is pertinent to suggest plausible recourse measures in order to further save the mid management workers from lay off.

Keywords:

1. Introduction

COVID-19, the unprecedented pandemic has affected almost everyone globally, in some or the other way. It would be no harm to call it as The Black Swan of 2020. It has not only affected individuals on a personal level, but has been a major cause of setback for industries both small and big. NASSCOM President, Debjani Ghosh, rightly articulates “There is no country, business or living being that has not been affected by the COVID pandemic.”

Undoubtedly COVID crisis has changed lives drastically. The fallout has hit both the employed and the unemployed and triggered the labour market calamity. According to Avery et al. (2020) the International Labour Organization has predicted that the pandemic might impact global working hours by nearly 7 percent in the latter half of 2020 which would be parallel to 195 million permanent jobs. But there is a real risk in this pandemic of a long-term unemployment for mid-level or mid management workers. Mid management workers are more prone to distinctive and significant challenges even after the COVID crisis. Due to the pandemic, the response of employment and skills has shifted the focus to younger workers but the mid-level workers are likely to face harsh adversities. They are more prone to facing adversities after returning to work in respect to other employees who have not been as privileged as younger employees in terms of employment support programs.

At certain times and stages in careers, when one feels listless and unanchored, but the unprecedented crisis has made the mid-career crisis worse. In the book written by Alvin Toffler from which the series gets its name, Toffler determines in the nearing times, a person’s capability will take a backseat in respect to one’s copability. Due to the changing job market the capacity of performing and also coping with the situation will become of more importance with constant changes in job, work spaces, compensation and work hours. It also impacts the availability of work and hours which leads to an enormous amount of stress and apprehension.

The pandemic has foreshadowed the deep-rooted issues which has led to the labour market being more prone to damage bringing out the inequalities in structure, with low income employees, the self-employed, informal sector workers and mid-aged employees been the most affected by the catastrophe. This crisis has brought an

unforeseen decrease in employment and also the hours allotted. In the major G20 countries where data is readily available, labour has been forced to work on a monthly basis which has led to a sudden decrease in employment opportunities leading to mass unemployment or suspension or just not having their contracts renewed. This situation does not seem to recover even after COVID.

Though it is undebatable that almost every sector and individual has faced the wary of this pandemic, this paper majorly focuses on the plight of mid-management job crisis after the COVID times.

Who are at Mid-management/level:

As mentioned by Goodman and Minner (2019) "Middle Management refers to managers who are below the top level of management, and who are responsible for controlling and running an organizational chart rather than making decisions about how it operates."

Human beings pass through different stages of development in their careers, positions ranging from entry-level, senior management or early to mid-career. Mid-management or mid-level employees mainly comprises of people who have moved on from the entry level phase but are not reaching the end of their career. Some examples of job titles within mid-level management are a general manager, regional manager, divisional manager and plant manager. Middle-level managers are supposed to aid them, assist and help the first-level managers and should pass on the records or activities to the senior or executive level managers. The middle-level managers are heavily involved in the work and operations regarding the business and have a thorough knowledge regarding their field of specialization. They are intended to look after small or large groups of workers in various divisions, department and business locations. These managers might get promoted in their own company from first level employees or might be hired from outside according to their requirement.

2.Challenges At Mid-Management Level

Middle-level managers are the pillars of the company, especially large associations. They create the bridge of access between the senior leaders on one side and the ground level employees on the other end. Middle-level managers are responsible for implementing and strategizing the various policies and also oversees the day to day activities and we can conclude that the companies' successes or failures are directly proportional on the quality of the employees they have. An efficient middle-level manager also creates the path for future leaders. A strong team of managers also looks after their employees leading to less workers leaving the company and serving the company for longer period of time. But often faced their own set of challenges.

As coined by Wakeman(2017) mid-level workers often facing adversities surrounding their jobs being obsolete due the preference of companies in choosing other employees with much improved skillset whereas not continuing with their former employees which has even worsened with this pandemic.

Globally, lockdowns have foreclosed many companies and have forced billions of people restricted to their home for weeks, leading to drastic unemployment. 'Last hired, first fired' has always been a fair and equitable HR policy, but COVID-19 crisis has shown otherwise. The first possible victim of downsizing have been older employees. The former employees are less likely to improve their skills or learn new ones, hence making it more strenuous for companies to retain them which is paving their way for early retirements.

Accenture put out a report on how jobs need to be re-conceptualized and re-designed to stay in tune with the ever-changing world especially after the pandemic. Accenture says that organizations need to be more digital, data driven, powered by technology and enabled by cloud for faster speed to market. The report also focused on a redefined, reskilled, redeployed workforce with a new mindset. But the lingering question is on the adaptability of mid-level workforce with this changing scenario¹.

3.Middle Management: The meat of Corporate Sandwich:

Middle-layer management might look like an enticing position to be in, but this truth is farfetched from reality. Employees at mid-level are the most stressed among the different rankings within the company. As mentioned by Hopper(2018) the role extends from being a first-level employee to leading a group of employees, outweighing it with lots of stress that the middle management has to grapple up with. One might assume they have the option to be free from responsibilities surrounding the top level and also being pliable in the likes of the first-level workers but the truth is far from the associated norm.

Middle management is the most stressed and frustrated people and has a depression rate higher than both their subordinates and seniors in the organization, proved the statistics. It has been seen that 18% of the mid-

level employees deal with clinical distress and severe anxiety and almost 50% of the mid-level employees need to work overtime by taking it home later. The mid-level employees of a certain association are more likely to be subjected to various kinds of company structures. They are not given the authority of making decisions where required but they are expected to show results according to the company's demands and necessities. The ever-changing responsibilities of a mid-level manager takes a toll on their productivity and satisfaction and are reduce to extreme pressure and take a toll on their mental health.

4.Possible Causes Of Plight For Mid-Management Workers

4.1.Automation:

Industry is once again facing the sting of pink slips and mass-firings, all around especially in mid-management roles and the one of the major reasons is dependency on automation which has considerably increased during the COVID.

Arasli et al (2019) economic Times Jobs Disruption Survey found out that mid-level employees in associations have a more threatening risk of losing their employment in respect to junior or senior level employees. 11,000 workers who were interviewed expressed that mid-level workers are standing in front of the firing squad. According to this survey it was stated that 66 per cent people stated that it was the mid-level workers most eligible to be sacked first. Almost 22 per cent people stated that it was the workers at the senior level while 12 per cent said those who are having entry level jobs were more worried about being let go. The reasoning behind mass employment are not to be determined. Most of the mid-level workers mainly manage junior associates, keep track of their quality and flow of the work assigned to them and also responsible for training new workers. A massive chunk of their job is getting automated which in the future makes them more prone on being extinct as there work will not carry much value and wit. As told by Veale(2018) nowadays machine-learning forums are already collaborating with project managers this helping them to make decisions regarding better trade-offs opportunities pertaining to the number of people required to complete a project and the amount of time necessary. The managers at middle -level are not required to anymore to make those viable decisions. Thus incorporating a fear of getting the blow or being axed by the company more threatening among the age group of people ranging from 35 to 50 years of age.

4.2.Jobs for mid-level role are fewer with less pay:

All in all, the COVID-19 calamity is a "stress test" pertaining to mid management workers because once laid off, it becomes hard to land into another job because pay is less for a worker with an experience of 5-10 years, states a techie from Hyderabad after being laid off. In words of RP Yadav who is the chairman and managing director of Genius Consultants "By this stage in their career, they are likely to have built expertise. It's hard to change the line of work. While searching one has to be a little flexible. It's important to keep professional learning alive and consider project-based work for the moment,"

All over various businesses and associations the decrease in employment have made the employees more vulnerable and they are also feeling the heat lately. As told by Wells (2017) the major setback are of the middle-level employees having experience of 10-20 years. The jobs which are opening are less in number which is letting them seek a new path of options giving them an avenue of exploring new opportunities.

4.3.Increased use of Artificial Intelligence:

Mid management job levels have seen a loss as Artificial Intelligence (AI) takes over their role which has become even more prominent during and after the COVID crisis. This is a direct correlation to meaning that most of our work will be taken up by machines which would make it simpler but take away lot of job opportunities.

For example, the managers playing a vital role in being charge of a specific or multiple projects with an association are project managers. Their main work is to look after that the workload is completed within the time frame, also helping to analyze a range of projects far as to maintaining and development of the application. They are also supposed to be giving updates on the status of the projects and also evaluating them and sharing their opinions on the number of employees required for the project and also shedding light on other factors such the competence, proficiency and ability of the employees. But all of this soon can be replaced by Project management tools with inbuilt AI.

Discussing the various roles in corporate companies, jobs are usually allocated to workers who are having experience over 10 years. It means that the middle-level jobs of employees are being done by machines. As mentioned in Maedche et al(2017) a major IT company Capgemini has been known to be using the cognitive consulting tool Watson, a prototype of IBM for allocating employees to various projects. On the other hand

another company Infosys is in the process of building a machine learning platform which would be an aid to projects managers as it will be helping them to make decisions such as reassigning employees or taking more efficient people for a project also maintaining the timeframe of the project.

5. Effective Recourse

The Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented and a major disruptor in a various sense. Similar to other crises, such as 9/11 or the 2008 financial downturn, employees feel scared and worried because as they say ‘uncertainty triggers fear’.

Emergence of digital technologies such as cloud, artificial intelligence and machine learning is one of possible reasons to lay off at mid-level roles. A recent report by McKinsey India said, “The bigger challenge ahead of the industry will be to retrain 50-60% of the workforce as there will be a significant shift in technologies.” The report further said if techies do not re-train themselves they might become insignificant.

This has called for re-skilling of a significant chunk by corporates, but the workers at the mid-level are seen more hesitant to changing. It is said that the employees would be less skilled or less prone to learning new skills so they probably would be sacked more in respect to the employees at lower level. Corporates find it easy to teach new employees or first-level employees as they are quicker to pertaining new technology or tools as they are already quite accustomed to digitization. The younger people use technology on a day to day basis so they could easily meet the client requirements. In these times the only way to survive and sustain is to get better and learn new technologies. Companies are turning more and more towards automation and machine learning. Artificial intelligence has also paved a new way for newer and improved models and employees who have worked with these specific technologies are most likely to be hired as companies make more money as they get more projects but need to hire less and more efficient employees.

Apart from this, policy responses from the government side are also needed to help mitigate the impact of the crisis on individuals and regions. According to Gössling et al (2020) a report by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) unemployment will remain high in 2021 and a job recovery is not expected until after 2021. The pandemic COVID-19 has initiated one of the worst catastrophes since time of the Great Depression. This calamity has led to an increase in the scarcity and deprivation broadening the inequalities which will be seen for years ahead. Countries should do everything in their hands to improve the situation otherwise it will lead to social calamity from just a job calamity. Redesigning and re-conceptualizing a better efficient work environment will lead to a better investment for future endeavors.

Most countries are acquires programs which are helpful for job retention so that the workers can be employed in potent jobs. We need to acquire measures such as Germany’s Kurzarbeit or France’s Activite’ partielle where the hours not worked are also considered and also makes up for the money lost by the workers. Thus supporting the company financially. They also should help to increase the salary of workers as seen in The Netherland’s Now(Noodmatregel Overbugging Werkgelgenheid) or the job Keeper Payment in Australia. These. examples of these countries could act as guiding light to save jobs and support workers².

International Organizations like International Labour Organization (ILO) are enabling various countries for developing a responsive framework. According to the knowledge evaluation process, the company is quite fast to realize the priorities which are specific to different sectors and nations. ILO impartial response foresees four main areas of expertise: it helps to protect the employees with the association, it helps to keep us with the increase in demand of labour making it more profitable, Helps to provide employment to workers thus enabling them to earn a living and lastly help coordinate dialogues pertaining between the government, employers and employees trying to find effective solutions for making all of them to benefit from each other.

In third world countries such as India, a ‘One UN socio-economic response to COVID-19’ is being formulated under the guidance from the UN Resident Coordinator. The leading agency for the United Nations Country Team is the ILO which looks after the resulting area “Skilling, Entrepreneurship and Job Creation”. The following states like Odissa and Uttar Pradesh helps to initiate suitable responses for associations and employees for the economy.

Governments can be seen to develop a gritty view that the jobs available making it more difficult for employees to get appointed thus making the industry jobs to be at risk. Each job can be evaluated in respect to the level of exposure of disease in that particular role and also the amount of shock that the job has endured

during the calamity, stated a report by Mckinsey³. This approach could help attain constructive results on part of government and direct resources initially to sectors in need of urgent interventions to safeguard employment

5.1.Supporting job creation:

With the increasing macroeconomic policies, which might help to support the lessening of hiring opportunities and by providing higher salaries which might help for employing or reinstating more candidates and also help in the promotion of new job opportunities thus paving the way for a better future.

5.2..Micromanagement in times of crisis:

In times of a pandemic it might not be appropriate for considering a predetermined response in terms of emergency. It is for the leaders to act and determine the future problem and the potential calamity it might enable. It enables the acquisition of a flexible way which is based on the evaluation of the current situation of the association or the particular team by initiating authentic information received earlier.

Various leaders can prepare certain solutions by instating certain teams to handle different situations such as action teams, response-leadership teams, tech management, external and internal communication teams and also colleague outreach teams for efficient collection, verification, comparison and circulation of data inside the corporation. The final task on the addendum is to deal and empathize to any tragedy associated with a human being. A leader's job can stretch from sending motivating emails to its employees each day or circulating precautionary measures or could simply be managing foundations of employees working from home. A person who can efficiently perform of the above roles could be seen as a great leader.

5.3.Middle management training is the missing piece of the jigsaw:

Any certain adversity can be determined by two traits – being capricious and instability. It is an attractive trait of a leader not to live in the past, rather to make strides for making a better future. Without a doubt, the environment will continue throwing curveballs at employees and management teams. Leaders must act now and look for long term solutions by ensuring managers have the necessary training both in terms of copability and capability.

The leaders in all sectors such as public, social and private are taking immediate and necessary actions for managing and keeping up with the fast growing adversity in work environments. But there is always a place for achieving greater agility, focus, bluntness and innovation.

The people who are setting the norms must think outside the specified policies for recovery and get started on building a better future of work which is safer, environment friendly, fairer to everyone concerned and also quite effective which helps in prohibiting the consequences of calamities and adversities in the future which helps with the lessening of income. The term “Building back better” is coined to deal with the coherence of policies especially in terms of economy, the social aspect of it , from the employment perspective and lastly as an approach pertaining to the complete society.

6.Effects Of Lay Off On Mid-Management

The pandemic COVID-19 is the most threatening health calamity the world has come accross in a century and it could also be one of the biggest problem faced in the history in terms of employment and availability of jobs. At times when humans were sacked from their jobs, they suffer problems not just in terms of money but also intrapersonal issues such as loss of hope and dignity. Being unemployed for longer periods of time may also have led to being more frustrated and worsening their situation leading to severe depression. Lay-off at mid-management level could lead to a permanent job loss which would greatly diminish or reduce the need for consumer spending thus creating unrecoverable effect creating a huge blow on the economy. Mental health has taken a toll due to lay off and depleting savings for many.

7.Effect Of Pandemic On Industry

The terrible effect of the pandemic and measures of being contained at one place for an insufferable amount of time has led to a critical decline in activity in terms of economy as a vast amount of people were not able to go for work or any other activity and several businesses could no longer run or operate. Production in the industry went down around 28% in G20 countries on an average in just two months between February and April 2020. One of the largest descent was recorded in third world counties between 40 and 60 percent such as India, Indonesia, Italy and South Africa and relatively less amount of decline in economy happened in Korea and

Russia. The data shown indicates a steady fall in economy which occurred in April in all countries except China, where the same happened in February. Although a rebound in economy occurred, the production in terms of industry in June 2020 still remained quite below than the pre-crisis level in all countries except China and Korea.

How Can Managers Help Themselves

Middle-management can also facilitate their cause by tackling the adversities that they face by becoming more responsive to change. Updating oneself according to changing needs and situation is the call of the hour.

No company or business really wants to sack people or formulate the riot act but if the situation deteriorates drastically, then it is better to be prepared to take it on rather than trying to ignore the situation. Having the willingness for making difficult decisions is the key of building a better future. Top level is always ensuring the activities of subordinates, so that the organization is running smoothly especially in difficult situations to envision how they react. That paves the way to ensure them having jobs in the future. If another such adversity happens the employees with better rating will have a better chance of survival than other workers with lower rating.

Being open to change especially to upskill and re skill is highly pertinent to survive one selves in crisis like these. Mid management is the backbone of any organization, and it is needed to the hour for them to become tech savvy and getting accustomed to automation. Not only this being open up new job opportunities and new career options could also help.

An importance should be given to focus all energy for strengthening and improving skills in terms of digitization especially for people who are trying to find better opportunities for working online.

Lastly for being able to retain the status, one must learn to take the problems and acknowledge the new reality so that their career is thriving even amidst the pandemic or because of it. Similarly, work habits are undergoing a sea change with most companies shedding their inhibitions of offering remote working, contract roles and commission-based compensation.

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