

Effect of Career Plateau on Job Stress and Managing Stress by Employees

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Abstract: Human resources management interventions are aimed at developing and assisting the plateaued employees of the organisation from job stress. In view of diverse needs of plateaued employees' organisations must change the ways in which they get their work done and redefine their social contract that connects them. Increased diversity in the organisation in terms of age, gender, and culture brings in additional challenge for human resource management. It comes under work force diversity intervention. Finally, organisations have increased their focus on wellbeing of their plateaued employees using programs such as stress management counselling, work life balance, health and fitness consciousness. career planning and development interventions helps to recruit and retain skilled and knowledgeable workers. Career is the route map of a person's life. Earlier career was looked upon as the advancement and promotion of an individual in an organisation but nowadays it is defined in a holistic way to include a person's attitude and experience.

Keywords: Career Plateau, Job stress, interventions, job performance, counselling

I. INTRODUCTION

Human resource management interventions are concerned with managing the plateaued employees from stress which if not treated properly will adversely affect the performance of the employees which in turn affects the organisation. OD practitioners increasingly have become involved in organisation design and employee involvement. They have realized the need to change personnel practices to bring them more in line with new designs and processes. OD practitioners continue to focus on intervention while becoming more knowledgeable about human resource management. In the real world the current work force involves diverse ethnic origin age, educational background and families. Apart from this they also face physical and mental challenges, in recent times organizations' are taking greater responsibility for employee's illness welfare by instituting employee assistance programs and stress management interventions.

II. INTERVENTIONS

A. Work Force Diversity Intervention

In the real world current workforce includes the plateaued employees from diverse ethnic origins, age educational background and families facing physical and mental challenges.

B. Employee Wellness Interventions

In the recent times organizations' are taking greater responsibility for the plateaued employee's welfare. By instituting employee assistance programs and stress management interventions. it has been found that plateaued employees stress related illnesses are gradually decreasing and also this has become a global phenomenon. Under this category two interventions are looked into which have got importance. They are

- Employee assistance programs(EAP's)
- Stress management programs.

EAP's are reactive programs which identify and treats the plateaued employee's problem that impact work performance. Stress management programs are both proactive and reactive they help the plateaued employees cope with consequences caused by stress for plateaued employees.

III. EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

There is an increase in loss of productive time due to plateaued employee's psychological and physical problems. It has been identified that one cause for these problems is stress at work. EAP's identify, refer and treat them. EAP was started with the aim of combating alcoholism but now it is used for dealing not only towards specific issues but also could be more broad based to include a range of problems. The underlying principle of EAP is that though organisation do not have the right to include into employees personal life they can fix standards of productivity and set behavioral conditions when productivity and work performance norms are not achieved, EAP's can also have positive effect on absenteeism, turnover and job performance on plateaued employees.

A. Identification and Referral

The first step of an EAP program is referral of the plateaued employee with work performance problem and having them consider the option of entering the EAP. This type of referral is called formal referral.



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For formal referral the organisation needs to maintain records of work performance of plateaued employees and when the performance falls below standards corrective action has to be taken. An informal referral occurs when an employee enters into an EAP on his own without performance related problem being deducted.

The activities needed to support these initial steps are as follows

- First there should be a clearly articulated policy regarding EAP.
- Secondly top management and the HR department must openly support EAP.
- Thirdly training and development programs must equip HR managers to identify and record performance related problems.
- Finally the identity of the plateaued employees using the EAP must be kept confidential to gain the support of the workforce.

B. EAP Office

The EAP office helps on evaluating plateaued employees problem and provides counselling followed by referral to treatment resources. It also monitors them during treatment and helps them to reintegrate into workforce. The resources of EAP vary from program to program.

C. Implementing an EAP

EAP's varies according to the organizations' philosophies, policies and procedure. The following seven steps are suggested for any EAP implementation.

- Develop an EAP policy procedure.
- Select and train program coordinator.
- Obtain the employee/union support for EAP.
- Publicize the program.
- Establish relation with health care provider's insurers.
- Schedule EAP.
- Continually monitor and administer the plan.

IV. STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Stress management like other interventions is facilitated by people with specialized knowledge and skills such as psychologists, physicians and other health professionals specializing in work stress. The concept of stress is best understood using a model describing organizational and personal dysfunctional consequences of stress.

Stress is the individual's response to the environment causing people to adjust their behavior.

The responses may be both physiological and psychological. A mismatch between a person's needs and abilities and the expectation and demand of the environment leads to motivation and better productivity. The model identifies specific occupational stressors. The stress model shows that any dimension of the organization can cause negative stress and hence all the OD interventions can play a role in stress management.

There are two key types of stress interventions

- Directed towards diagnosing and understanding the causes of stress.

- Directed towards changing the cause and helping people cope with stress.

A. Occupational stressors

The working model of stress identifies several organisational factors causing stress as below:

- Work load can be a constant source or stress particularly for managers and white collar employees who have to process complex information and difficult decisions
- Quantitative overload is too much work to be done in available time.
- Qualitative overload has to do work that is too difficult with reference to the employee's skill and abilities.

It has been found that overload could be due to the plateaued employees need for achievement and hence overload maybe self-inflicted when there is a balance between the type and quantity of work and, what the plateaued employee can handle. Then he experiences positive stress leading to motivation and productivity.

When the two do not match employee faces negative consequences of stress. Stress can be either due to overload or underload. Stress can also be due to roles, where role can be defined as the sum total of expectations of individual and significant others have about how the person should perform a specific job problem arises due to role ambiguity. Normally role ambiguity exists in most organizations' particularly at higher levels where there is a lack of clarity and demands of various segments are contradictory. All this can cause severe stress such as increased tension, dissatisfaction, reduced commitment and withdrawal.

B. Individual Differences

The individual differences such as hardiness social support, age, education, occupation, race etc can cause stress. Apart from these individual behavioral patterns such as type A and B personalities also cause differential stress. Type A persons are more prone to stress than type B. This is because Type A persons tend to do more work with in a given time and tend to overlook contingencies and hence become stressed when something unforeseen happens. On the other hand Type B persons are less hurried and aggressive than Type A personalities. In most organizations' Type A personalities are rewarded and such people tend to go up the organisation faster with regular promotions. Eventually Type A behaviors are not suitable at top levels as in those positions patience is required to deal with ambiguity and issues often neglected by Type A.

V. DIAGNOSIS AND AWARENESS OF STRESS AND ITS CAUSES

Stress management is a preventive method in which either the cause of stressor removed or employee's capability to face stress is improved. Whichever method we use diagnosis is the starting point. The current organizational situation and the awareness about the causes of stress and the sources are analyzed to get information needed to develop a matching stress management program.

There are two methods of diagnosis



- Charting of stressors
- Health profiling

A. Charting of stressors

Two types of information must be correlated to understand which of the stressors cause the most stressful negative consequences. This type of analysis helps in not only identifying the organizational condition that need improvement / elimination but also the category of the plateaued employees who will be affected and needs special attention.

Health Profiling: This method targets the stress symptoms to correct or remove the organisation condition which causes them. The health profile tells us as to how the risk can be reduced by making environmental and personal changes.

- CONFRONTATION: Getting relaxed and staying cool and in control.
- COPING: focussing on the present set of stressors.
- SELF REINFORCEMENT: Handling it well

The major contribution of this method is to sensitize the plateaued employees to the presence of stress and training them to take personal action. Additionally this method relieves them from depending on others for stress management.

Recently organizations are helping the plateaued employees to undergo a tolerance test. There are evidences that these programs reduce absenteeism, turnover and improved performance but the results are not conclusive and reproducible.

VI. ALLEVIATING STRESS AND COPING WITH STRESS

After getting diagnostic report and the health profile of the plateaued employees the next step in stress management is to find out the ways of alleviating the stress or helping them to cope with stress. One of them may always not be a solution moreover many a times both methods may have to be used to correct the prevailing situation in an organisation effectively. There are two methods available for alleviating stress.

- Role clarification
- Supportive relationships

A. Role Clarification

Employees are helped to understand the demands of their work roles better by using a systematic process of revealing others expectations and activities constituting a particular role .there are several role clarification methods are available out of them job evaluation technique and role analysis technique are commonly used and they follow similar strategy.

Firstly people relevant to defining particular roles are identified and brought for a meeting at a location that is usually away from the organisation.

Secondly a OD consultant acts as a facilitator. And they try to implement participative methods. The ambiguity in such situation can be stressful and role clarification helps alleviate the stress.

B. Supportive Relationships

Supportive relationships are important in OD interventions.it has been held that supportive bosses can act as buffers against stressful situations. Common stressful conditions are planning to improve the career path. Having the skillset awareness required in current trends. Planning for short and long term career progress, organisation conducting career management programs

C. Stress Inoculations

Stress inoculation training helps the plateaued employees cope with stress rather than changing the stressor themselves. They are encouraged to admit if they are overstressed or under stressed and develop a concrete plan to cope with the situation. It is followed by addressing to four stages of stress coping cycle.

- PREPARATION; Thinking of action plan against these stressors.

VII. METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data are used for this study. A questionnaire is administered in few of manufacturing industries in Chennai and the responses are collected as primary data. The same respondents are interviewed to know the effect of plateau on the job stress. The companies are selected based on convenience sampling. A sample of 120 employees were selected in these manufacturing industries. Employees staying in the same cadre for three or more years are chosen for the survey and interview.

Hypothesis is formed and tested by using Pearson's Correlation test.

H1. Career plateau has direct relation to job stress

H0. Career plateau has no relation to job stress

The questionnaire circulated has 5 segments. First part is of personal information of the employees, second part is concentrates on the factors that are causing plateau in the career. Third part of the questionnaire talks on the effect of career plateau on the employees' attitude, fourth part concentrates especially on the relation between career plateau and job stress and fifth part queries about the methods followed for managing job stress. Five point Likert type scale is used to collect the responses.

VIII. ANALYSIS

Responses for the questionnaire is tabulated segment wise and shown in table 1 below

Table.1. Consolidated Responses of the employees

	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	Row Total(y)
Segment1	28	6	5	0	0	39
Segment2	8	33	1	2	3	47
Segment3	0	3	18	2	0	23
Segment4	0	0	2	1	1	4
Segment5	0	0	0	4	3	7
Column Total(x)	36	42	21	14	7	120



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Table .2 Calculation of Rank Correlation coefficient

X	Y	XY	X ²	Y ²
36	34	1224	1296	1156
42	42	1764	1764	1764
21	24	504	441	576
14	12	168	196	144
7	8	56	49	64
$\sum X = 120$	$\sum Y = 120$	$\sum XY = 3716$	$\sum X^2 = 3746$	$\sum Y^2 = 3704$

Pearson's correlation coefficient(r) =

$$r = \frac{N \sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{N \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2} \sqrt{N \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2}}$$

$$= \frac{5*(3716)-120*120}{\sqrt{5(3746)-(120)^2} \sqrt{5(3704)-(120)^2}}$$

$$r = 0.99$$

r value is positive and nearer to 1

IX. RESULT

The Pearson Correlation shows that the r value is positive and nearer to '0'. This confirms that there exists high degree of relationship between career plateau of the employees and job stress.

X. CONCLUSION

Work force diversity interventions are aimed at helping the plateaued employees and HR professionals cope with diversity in terms of gender, age, disability and culture. Career plateau creates negative impacts like low job satisfaction, bad attitude at work place, high stress and poor performance etc. This will cause high turnover ratio also. By enriching the jobs and motivating the employees their career plateau can be handled.

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