

Midlife Crisis Takes on New Meaning in IT Services

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A Survival Guide for IT Middle Managers

GO BEYOND
project execution
skills and explore
latest
technologies

REINVENT WAYS
to manage clients
and teams

BECOME
accountable and
seek frequent
performance
feedback

THINK NOT JUST ABOUT
tasks and results, but
career journeys of your
team members

LEARN TO SPOT
TECHNOLOGY
SKILLS TRENDS TO
STAY AHEAD

RESPOND QUICKLY
TO THE EVER-
CHANGING TECH
ENVIRONMENT



Mumbai | New Delhi: A project manager in an IT services firm in Bengaluru lives in perpetual anxiety. His company has fired many people and he fears that jobs such as his will be among those axed when the company “cuts the flab further” because he isn’t among those doing the “work clients are billed for”.

“I’m at a relatively higher salary level but am probably perceived to be among the most dispensable. We are the ones who will be affected the most by automation,” said the project manager, who did not wish to be identified.

He has been turning to industry seniors on advice for further skill enhancement he could pursue but worries he may have become too set in his ways. So he has put off the purchase of a second home that was on the cards. Moreover, he said the entire family is now consciously cutting back on expenses.

It’s a crisis facing middle managers like him, who have risen up the ranks to people manager roles but are now increasingly realising that theirs are the jobs likely to be hit the hardest as the industry gears up to adapt to the changes brought about by automation and newer technologies.

“There is a lot of pressure on middle managers, which they can deal with by upskilling themselves. Unfortunately, 40-50% of them don’t want to change,” said Manmeet Singh, president at Experis, ManpowerGroup India. “They want to stay people managers because traditionally career progression has been measured by the number of people they managed. But times are changing,

and without upskilling, many will end up losing their jobs.”

India has about 1.4 million mid-rung employees in the IT sector, who typically have eight to 12 years of experience and earn ₹12-18 lakh a year; and the number of such employees is likely to grow with each passing year.

This is because every year, IT Indian companies hire thousands of engineering graduates from colleges across the country. As these fresh graduates progress in their career, many of them go on to manage teams and projects. However, with this career advancement, some may lose touch with core technical skills. With new processes and technologies flooding the market constantly, there is a need for mid-level managers to keep themselves abreast of the changes.

“Due to the emergence of automation and artificial intelligence-based processes across industrial sectors, the need for

managing people is expected to reduce dramatically,” said Sanju Ballurkar, CEO of staffing company Magna Infotech, a division of Qess Corp.

TeamLease Services has seen up to 20% increase in resumes from IT mid-managers with work experience of eight to 15 years over the past one year. “They are desperate to join any industry and are also open to relocate. Most of them are available to join immediately or within a half-month’s notice,” said Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder of TeamLease Services.

Today, more than 60% mid-level managers work in day-to-day project execution to deliver on client requirements. But that may not be the requisite skill or approach now.

“Mid-level managers are often in a confused state due to their inability to keep pace with the changing scope of their clients’ needs, particularly in IT services,

where technology or scope of work is constantly changing,” said Arif Khan, chief HR officer at Sasken Technologies.

“Today, it is expected that mid-level managers should partner with the client and consult them in all aspects of the delivery process. They should also make suggestions for the future road map and always be equipped for change,” he said.

The Experis IT Employment Outlook Survey from Experis IT Manpower Group India for October 2017-March 2018 found that hardly 3% employers are planning to hire in the 10 years-plus experience band. The senior level is also expected to see layoffs.

According to Experis’ Singh, the challenge is that India is going through a talent transformation cycle. “Those in people management roles have reached a plateau. The span of control is increasing

CHANGE REQUIRED

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now. Earlier, a manager would manage eight to 14 people. Soon one manager will be required for 35-40 people. Companies will not require mid-managers in large numbers,” he said.

Experis data shows that among practice

areas and skills in demand, cloud computing and software as a service lead the pack with a net employment outlook of 29%. Big Data and analytics come in second place (22%), followed by machine learning (12%) and mobility (12%), and global content solutions (10%).

According to Kameshwari Rao, group vice president-people strategy at Sapient India, it has become imperative for managers to re-imagine how they manage their clients and their people.

As part of its performance management approach called ‘Enabling your Potential’, the company steers the managers to think not just about tasks and results but also career journeys for the team members.

Another important skill which the service industry needs to bring in is the culture of innovation in order to get managers to think and be proactive instead of working in a reactive mode, Khan said.

For organisations, the option is to either develop talent internally or hire talent. Mindtree does a combination of both, said Anish Philip, assistant vice president (people function) at Mindtree.

Four years ago, in a survey, the company saw a dip in middle-manager engagement. When a diagnosis was run on understanding the reasons, it became evident that learning, recognition and connect of middle managers needed to be addressed. That, Philip said, led them to make large-scale investments. “Learning Investments were made in three areas — managerial capability, technology and leadership,” he said.

“There is a larger onus on individuals too. Earlier individuals didn’t invest much on learning new skills. Now they are more aware and getting certifications on their own,” he said.