

The Ripple Effect: How Career Shock Reshapes Professional Spaces and Faces in Academia

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Abstract: This study examines the initial responses of employees who witnessed career shocks, particularly layoffs, within their organisations. The focus lies on the experiences of individuals who observed their colleagues being suddenly let go, rather than those directly impacted by the layoffs. Employing a constructivist grounded theory approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 27 professionals across various industries. Our findings reveal a grounded theory that explains how witnessing career shocks can act as a catalyst for career adaptability, compelling employees to reassess their professional trajectories, develop new skills, and explore alternative career pathways. The study highlights how the aftermath of such shocks influences employees' career development perspectives, decision-making processes, and approaches to navigating uncertainty. Employees often seek clarity and resources to adapt, particularly when organisational change outcomes are ambiguous. This research provides actionable insights for organisations to support employees through career shocks, emphasising the importance of transparent communication, tailored interventions, and fostering a culture of resilience to mitigate both immediate and long-term impacts.

Keywords: Career Shock, Organizational Change, Layoffs, Career Adaptability, Resilience, Employee Well-Being

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