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Ritu

Assistant Professor, Yoga Science, Department of Physical Education, M.K.J.K College, Rohtak, Haryana, India

Impact of yoga on mental health of working people

Ritu

Abstract

The most crucial factor in the success of an organization is the productivity of its work force which in turn is dependent on the psychological as well as social well being of its employees. And today's rapidly moving lives of the common man is filled with stress as an outcome of the role-conflicts, enhanced expectations and desires etc. Stress has an adverse affect one's health, work performance, social life and even the relationship with family members. The stress, factors leading to it and consequences of stress are to be understood at individual and organizational level.

The changed working conditions, multiple and overlapping roles have increased stress to a greater extent at workplace. Stress has emerged as a major issue for the businesses and has reached alarming proportions due to its negative impacts. Organizations must develop stress prevention as well as stress reduction techniques. This paper focuses on Yoga and meditation as the best practices adopted by organizations to prevent, reduce and to overcome stress at work place.

Keywords: Yoga and Meditation, Workplace Stress, Factors of Stress, Stress Management

Introduction

Stress is also considered as negative consequence or resultant of modern and a fast moving way of living. In an age of highly dynamic and competitive world, human beings are facing all kinds of stressors or factors of stress that affect their family as well as work life. Hans Selye (1936) ^[1] first introduced the term stress into life - science. The term stress is derived from the Latin word 'Stringere' which means to be drawn tight. Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his life. The famous behavioral scientist Stephen P. Robbins (2006) ^[2] defined it as: —stress arises from an opportunity, demand, constraint, threat or challenge, when the outcomes of the event are important and uncertain.

Work stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury (Sauter *et al.*, 1999) ^[3]. Thus stress can be considered as a silent killer and may exert harmful effect on physical, psychological and behavioral well being of the employees. And organization must implement effective stress management techniques in order to maintain the productivity of the organization with Stress – free employees. Practice of Yoga and Meditation as stress management techniques are rapidly being adopted by many of the good organizations who are employee focused.

The stress response is a complex emotion that produces physiological changes to prepare us for fight or flight to defend ourselves from the threat or flee from it was quoted by Walter-Cannon (1932). Keeley and Harcourt (2001) ^[4] in their study "Occupational Stress: A Study of the New Zealand and Reserve Bank" revealed that stress is caused by heavy work demands in the job itself, which the unskilled employee with little control over how the work is done, cannot adapt to or modify. Kulkarni G.K. (2006) ^[5] in an article "Burnout" published in Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine 2006 said that rapid change of the modern working life is associated with increasing demands of learning new skills, need to adopt to new types of work, pressure of higher productivity and quality of work, time pressure and hectic jobs are increasing stress among the workforce. Further he added that privatization and globalization has ignited mergers, acquisitions, and precarious employment has critically affected the domestic industry. Stress that an employee encounters affects the productivity of organization (Bhattacharjee, 2009) ^[6].

Correspondence

Ritu

Assistant Professor, Yoga Science, Department of Physical Education, M.K.J.K College, Rohtak, Haryana, India

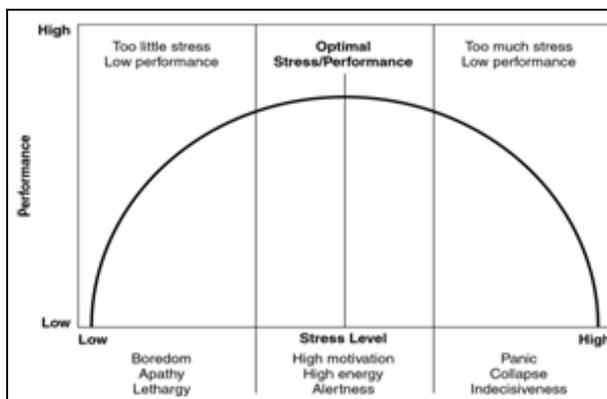
Stress: Impact on Work Place Productivity

There is no standardized process for handling concerns or grievances relating to stress at work place in the organisation. The notion that the employees should learn to cope up with stress at work, stress at work place is quite normal and that we need to manage it is completely wrong. Negligence towards the stress of employees at workplace would lose the organization its internal customers, the productivity even. Stress produces the degree of physiological, psychological, and behavioral deviation from healthy functioning. But stress if is of moderate conditions remain positive also. This positive stress is called eustress, referring to the healthy, positive, constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress response. This stress is enough to activate and motivate people in order to achieve goals and overcome their life's challenges.

Employees frequently experience enough stress that not only hinder their performance and efficiency but also increase their risk of mental and physical health problems. So, the main focus is more on distress than eustress. Work stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury (Sauter *et al.*, 1999) [7]. Thus stress can be considered as a silent killer and may exert harmful effect on physical, psychological and behavioral well being of the employees. And organization must implement effective stress management techniques in order to maintain the productivity of the organization with Stress –free employees. Practice of Yoga and Meditation as stress management techniques are rapidly being adopted by many of the good organisations who are employee focused.

Need for Stress management

Today people are stressed from overburden of work, job insecurity, information overload, conflicting roles and the increasing pace of life. Stress deteriorates the performance of employee which results in low turnover rates of the company. Stress, is the body's physical and psychological response to anything that's perceived as irresistible.



Mind tools (Source: www.mindtools.com)

Stressors, the causes of stress, include any environmental condition that brings burden of physical or emotional kind on an individual. Basically there are four main types of work-related stressors: interpersonal stressors, role-related stressors, task control stressors and organizational and physical environment stressors. Selye (1975) and McGrath (1976) [8] also suggest an inverted-U relationship between stress and performance. It is the responsibility of the organization to introduce the practices such as Yoga, Meditation etc. for

managing stress at workplace.

Stress management programs into the organization will have Stress –free and happy employees, performing better and will have long term commitment and retentions in the organizations. The objective of the present paper is to explain certain stress management practices like Yoga and Meditation to reduce the stress level amongst the employees of any organization.

Yoga & Meditation: Strategic Stress Management Practices

The corporate body has a moral responsibility to practice healthy work culture and environment. The employee spends most of his productive period of the day at his work place of the company. The management and the policy drafters must analyze the work environment they provide to the employees and should change in accordance to the comfortability of the employees. Yoga is one of the six foundations of Indian philosophy and has been used for millennia to study, explain, and experience the complexities of the mind and human existence (Feuerstein, 1998) [9].

Patanjali's Yoga sutras outline a skillful way of conducting life that fosters moderation and harmony (Becker, 2000) [10]. Bhole (1997) [11] in his conceptual paper, explained different aspects of Yoga. The Yoga way of life encompasses the philosophy of Karma Yoga (path of detached action), Jnana Yoga (knowledge of self), Bhakti Yoga (trust in the supreme order) and Raja Yoga (asana, pranayama, meditation, etc). The various meditation techniques work at the mental level, all these practices are intended to develop a certain type of awareness within oneself which in turn brings about a change in their emotional functions. Many researchers have noted the benefits of exercise in diminishing the stress response. Yoga has been recommended and studied in relationship to stress, although the studies are less scientifically replicable.

Nonetheless, several researchers claim highly beneficial results from Yoga practice in alleviating stress and its effects. According to Srinivas (1994) [12], a series of techniques collectively known under the general label, 'Yoga', present a rich source for generating indigenous organizational development techniques. Yoga offers a well formulated approach to planned change. The findings from empirical studies on Yoga revealed that long-term practitioners of Yoga had acquired a remarkable voluntary control over their autonomic processes which helped them in coping with psychological stress.

Dr. K.N Udupa (2000) [13] concluded in his research that stress-related disorders evolve gradually through four recognizable stages.

- The psychological changes such as anxiety, irritability and insomnia arise due to over stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system.
- In the second stage symptoms such as high blood pressure, elevated heart rate and increased intestinal motility surface.
- A more profound physical or biochemical imbalance starts invading,
- In last an irreversible symptom that often requires surgical or long term management appears.

Many of the yoga-based programs that have been widely studied in the use of stress reduction are being formulated and customized as per the corporate needs. The mindfulness-based stress reduction program includes guided instruction in mindfulness meditation practices, yoga and gentle stretching,

inquiry exercises to enhance awareness, individual instruction, group dialogue and home assignments. The Yoga classes are to be designed incorporating breathing techniques exercises for strength, vitality, and flexibility, guided relaxation and meditation.

Role of Meditation in Managing Stress

Meditation has proved to be of great help to combat stress and revitalize the mind. After doing meditation for 10 to 20 minutes once or twice a day, stress is seemed to be drifting away with positive energy. Meditation that cultivates mindfulness is particularly effective at reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions. Meditation is a skill tool for Life Enhancement, Workplace Efficiency, Stress Management, Emotional and Spiritual Fulfillment. It helps in balancing mind and body and increases mental alertness, concentration – resulting in clarity of decision making. A recent survey found that 60% of general practitioners wanted educational material to help in the management of stress, and that 28% of those seeking education were experiencing significant levels of stress.

Experiments have shown that meditators maintained psychological equilibrium under stress more effectively than non-meditators. The art of meditation has made its way into the corporate environment and is one of the best way to reduce stress in the workplace. Most of the companies today such as IBM Corp., Infosys etc. are offering meditation programs on-site to their employees to help them reduce stress. Meditation workshops have become a valuable training tool in the workplace because meditation has so many practical applications. It is a skill that can be easily learned and can be done anywhere, anytime stress occurs — walking down the hall, at a worker's desk, or in a stressful meeting. Even a few minutes of meditation done throughout the day can make a huge difference in a worker's attitude, productivity and effectiveness. (Richard Geller (2007) ^[14] is president of Med Works Corporate Meditation Programs in Brookline, a company that focuses exclusively on offering stress-reduction meditation programs on-site in the corporate environment in the metro (Boston area). The idea behind meditation is to consciously relax your body and focus your thoughts on one thing for a sustained period.

Based on the various clinical relaxation researches conducted by various psychologists worldwide, it is considered that breathing is an important component of the relaxation response. Author reports that certain meditation styles bring some biochemical and physical changes in the body, which may be collectively referred to as the "relaxation response" that includes changes in metabolism, heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and brain chemistry.

Stress tends to be either ignored or dismissed by the very people who are best placed to do something about it – managing and senior directors, personnel and training managers, occupational health workers, and departmental managers and supervisors. The opportunity exists for employers and employees to get together and make way for changes that will reduce stress related illness. Change must come from the top, and it is therefore imperative for managers to recognize that they have a legal and moral responsibility to protect the physical and mental wellbeing of their workers (Clark, 2002) ^[15]. It is the top management people who can motivate organizations to explore the stress factors in their work environments, and to take steps to reduce and prevent it along with the maintenance of the health and wellbeing of employees.

Conclusion

It is crystal clear that there is a positive and significant relationship between stress and the practices of yoga & meditation. It is moral responsibility of the organisations to implement upon such practices that would surely build right attitude and outlook of the problems at the work place to the employees. Stress can be minimized if companies take the right initiatives at right time in right direction. Stress –free employees perform better, work harder, happier and are more committed to the organization as compared to their counterparts.

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