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HANDLING WORK PLACE STRESS THROUGH YOGA, MEDITATION, BURN OUT AND HUMOUR

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Handling Work Place Stress through Yoga, Meditation, Burn Out and Humour

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Abstract – *The productivity of the work force is the most decisive factor as far as the success of an organization is concerned. The productivity in turn is dependent on the psychosocial well-being of the employees. Stress can affect one's health, work performance, social life and the relationship with family members. 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. The stressors and its consequences are to be understood at individual and organizational level. Stress in the workplace has emerged as a major issue for businesses and has reached alarming proportions. Organizations must develop stress prevention as well as stress reduction techniques. This study focuses on practices adopted by organizations to prevent, minimize and to overcome the stress. The study aims at understanding use of yoga, meditation, burn out and soothing humor by different organizations as an antidote to workplace stress.*

Keywords: *Workplace Stress, Stressors, Stress Management, Yoga, Meditation, Burn Out, Humor.*

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INTRODUCTION

Stress is a negative consequence of modern living. In an age of highly dynamic and competitive world, man is exposed to all kinds of stressors that can affect him on all realms of life. Hans Selye (1936) 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 or her life.

Eminent behavioral scientist Stephen P Robbins (2006) define it as: Stress arises from an opportunity, demand, constraint, threat or challenge, when the outcomes of the event are important and uncertain. Organizations do not have any formal process for handling concerns or grievances relating to stress. We also hear too often that we should learn to deal or cope with stress at work. This implies that workplace stress is normal and that we need to manage or handle stress and just get on with the job. This view of stress is wrong. Negligence towards the stress of employees at workplace would lose the organization a lot in term of efficiency, productivity, Medical bills, compensation etc. The events produce distress the degree of physiological, psychological, and behavioral deviation from healthy functioning. There is also positive side of stress, called eustress, which refers to the healthy, positive, constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress response. Eustress is the stress experience in moderation, enough to activate and motivate people so that they can achieve goals,

change their environments and succeed in life's challenges. Employees frequently experience enough stress to hurt their job performance and increase their risk of mental and physical health problems. So, the main focus is more on distress than eustress. Job 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).

Hence we can say that stress is a silent killer and prolonged exposure to stress may exert harmful effect on physical, Psychological and behavioral wellbeing of an individual. And organization must implement effective stress management techniques in order to maintain the productivity of the organization with Stress-free employees. This study focuses on use of Yoga, Meditation, Burn Out and soothing humor as stress management techniques for a stress free organization.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Stress in the workplace had emerged as a major issue for businesses and it has reached alarming proportions. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 80 percent of workers experience job stress. According to David Fontana: Stress is a demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind & body. 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) in their study on '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 GK (2006) 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). Team morale and company productivity is also adversely affected. Thus, stress is both a friend and a foe. (Batliwala, 1990). Studies of stress in the work environment tend to focus on psychosocial influences in the environment. This paper asserts that another important influence on work performance results from physical features of the work environment. Evidence is accumulating that the physical environment in which people work affects both job performance and job satisfaction (Brill, Margulis, & Konar, 1985; Clements- Croome, 2000; Davis, 1984; Dolden & Ward, 1986; Newsham, Veitch, Charles, Clinton, Marquardt, Bradley, Shaw, & Readon, 2004; Vischer, 1989, 1996). The tasks workers perform in modern office buildings are increasingly complex and depend on sophisticated technology.

NEED AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The study is very important as today people are stressed from overwork, job security, information overload 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. When challenge flips over into stress, it creates an imbalance that can trigger a whole variety of negative health effects. (Workers' health and safety centre, job stress, 2001/2002). It is responsibility of the organization to introduce the Yoga, Meditation and soothing humor for the stress Management at workplace. The present research done suggests that it is high time a new legislation is passed in all the organisations regarding the introduction of Yoga, Meditation and soothing humor in to help employee cope with workplace stress. Stress management programs into the organization will have a Stress –free employees, performing better,

Working harder and will have Long term commitment and retentions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY:

The main objective of the present research is to analyse the various factors causing stress at workplace. It aims at suggesting certain stress management techniques like Yoga, Meditation and Soothing Humor to minimize the stress level of employees.

The study is exploratory in nature and basically based on secondary data. For this purpose various books, Magazines, Journals, Newspapers, various websites of internet were referred. The research is carried out by doing rigorous literature review of the researches done on the stress management techniques like Yoga, Meditation, Burn Out and Soothing Humor as a tool for interventions to reduce/combat the workplace stress.

4.1 Causes and consequences of workplace stress

Causes		Consequences of distress
1) <u>Work related stressors:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-personal stressors <input type="checkbox"/> Role related stressors <input type="checkbox"/> Task control stressors <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational-physical environment stressors	S T	1) <u>Physiological:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Heart diseases <input type="checkbox"/> Ulcers <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Head aches <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disturbances <input type="checkbox"/> Increased illness
2) <u>Non-work stressors:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Time-based <input type="checkbox"/> Strain based <input type="checkbox"/> Role based conflict	R E	2) <u>Psychological:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Job Dissatisfaction <input type="checkbox"/> Low commitment <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaustion <input type="checkbox"/> Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Moodiness <input type="checkbox"/> Burnout
3) <u>Individual Differences :</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Personal health <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge-skill <input type="checkbox"/> Coping skills <input type="checkbox"/> Resilience work holism.	S S	3) <u>Behavioral:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Low job performance <input type="checkbox"/> More accidents <input type="checkbox"/> Faulty decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Higher absenteeism <input type="checkbox"/> Workplace aggression <input type="checkbox"/> Turnover/Absenteeism

MANAGEMENT OF STRESS:

According to Holt (1990), effective management of job stress can only be achieved under two conditions. First, the individual worker must be able to recognize stressors and understand their consequences and second, organizations must develop stress prevention, as well as stress reduction techniques. Any employee can suffer from stress regardless of age, status, gender, ethnicity or disability. It is important that managers, HR personnel, safety officers and welfare staff have a clear understanding of the main issues involved with workplace stress prevention and management. Organisations have to arrange a Stress Management Program that focuses on different categories of employees at all hierarchical level. Many situational observations of employee-employer interaction identified within the organization can lead to stress at work.

Stress Management is important for both individual and from the point of view of the organization. It is generally assumed that there are two basic

approaches to cope with stress i.e. individual oriented approach and organizational oriented approach.

YOGA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO STRESS MANAGEMENT:

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). Patanjali's Yoga sutras outline a skillful way of conducting life that fosters moderation and harmony (Becker, 2000). Bhole (1997) in his conceptual paper, explained different aspect 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). According to Bhole (1997), hatha-yoga practices like asanas (i.e. posture), pranayama (i.e. breathing practices intended to influence vital forces), kriyas (i.e., cleaning process), mudras (i.e., certain internal attitudes) and bandhas (i.e., neuro-muscular locks) are mostly taught as physical practices. While various meditation techniques work at the mental level, all these practices are intended to develop a certain type of awareness within oneself. This in turn is expected to bring about a change in the emotional and visceral functions and through them, a change in the intellectual and somatic functions of the individual.

Many researchers have noted the benefits of exercise in diminishing the stress response, and a host of studies points to these benefits. Yoga, too, 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.

Nagendra and Nagarathna (1988) have dealt with stress management in their book entitled, *New Perspectives in Stress Management*. According to authors, the ancient Indian science of Yoga holds the key for combating this modern menace. Coping styles or strategies may either be oriented towards avoiding stress or towards dealing with stress. (Pestonjee, 1999). This way Yoga helps one deal with stress in better way.

According to Srinivas (1994), a series of techniques collectively known under the general label, Yoga, present a rich source for generating indigenous organizational development techniques that may perhaps find better acceptance than imported intervention designs from the west. Originally developed for personal spiritual growth, 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. Rao (1995), Dr. K.N Udupa (2000) concluded in his research that stress-related disorders evolve gradually through four recognizable stages. Firstly 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. In the third stage, a more profound physical or biochemical imbalance sets in, while in the final fourth stage, irreversible symptoms that often requires surgical or long term management appears. Pande and Naidu (1986) in their study addressed only one aspect of Yoga philosophy (effort orientation instead of outcome orientation) and reported positive results on the stress-strain relationship.

Rudra Bhandari, Balkrishna Acharya and V. K. Katiyar (WCB 2010) , in their study *The yogic intervention* was comprised of selected yogic postures, breathing mechanics (Pranayama), gestures, psychic locks, concentrations, and meditations was given for one month among 50 corporate personnel (25 male & 25 female) from Indian Telephone Industry, Raebareilly, India. The result met showed significant effect of the yogic intervention to manage distress and enhance work performance at $p < 0.01$ and favored the efficacy of corporate yoga to boost health, harmony, morale, work motivation, commitment, performance and productivity at individual and organizational levels. Consequently, researcher thought of developing corporate yoga capsules and their scientific validation simultaneously at large.

Another Yoga-based program that has been widely studied in the use of stress reduction is the mindfulness-based stress reduction program (MBSR), which is taught, studied and popularized by Jon Kabat-Zinn and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. 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.

Campbell, Debra Elise, and Kathleen A. Moore (2004) With the dual aims of better understanding the contribution of Yoga to positive mental health and exploring links between yogic philosophy and psychological theory, researchers at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, conducted a study on Yoga as a preventative and treatment for symptoms of mental illness. The Yoga classes were designed as a six-week program incorporating breathing techniques (prânâyâma), exercises for strength, vitality, and flexibility (âsanâs), guided

relaxation (yoga-nidrâ), and meditation. Psychometric testing was carried out to assess symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression across three groups: regular Yoga practitioners, beginners entering the program, and people who did not practice Yoga and these tests were re-administered after six weeks. At the end of six weeks, the Yoga beginners group showed lower average levels of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress than at commencement, but levels were stable for regular Yoga practitioners and people who did not practice Yoga.

MEDITATION AND STRESS MANAGEMENT:

Meditation and Relaxation Response can help combat stress and revitalize the mind. First choose a word or phrase-such as, peace or one. Then sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, relax your muscles, and allow yourself to breathe slowly and naturally. As you exhale, repeat the word or phrase. After doing this for 10 to 20 minutes once or twice a day, you may notice your stress drifting away along with your exhalations. Meditation that cultivates mindfulness is particularly effective at reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions.

HUMOUR AND STRESS MANAGEMENT:

A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs-jolted by every pebble in the road. There is strong evidence that humor reduces dysfunctional stress (Yovetich et al. 1990). When making a joke about a stressful situation, one develops a sense of dominance and control over it (Henman 2001), which is incompatible with stress and anxiety (Smith et al. 1971). In other words, joking about a stressful event (e.g., downsizing) makes it less threatening. For example, humor reduces stress in the military by mocking the risk of death in marching songs and jokes. Humor makes people feel that they are not afraid; without fear they feel a greater sense of control (Dixon 1980), which is incompatible with feeling stress.

CONCLUSIONS:

The growing importance of interventional strategies is felt more at organizational level. This particular study was intended to study the importance of Yoga, meditation and humor to cope up with the workplace stress. Stress can be minimized if companies take the right steps. Stress-free employees perform better, work harder, feel happier and have a long term commitment to the organization as compared to their counterparts. It can be concluded from the present study that there is a positive and significant relationship between stress and Yoga, Meditation and Soothing humor. Now time has come when the organizations adopt the philosophy of 'Healthy mind and healthy body' which will help in cultivation of right attitude and transformation of present turbulent societies into a stress-free society or they will end up paying price for it. This study is done in the area of

Yoga, Meditation and Soothing humor with an From the study it can be suggested that organization can implement even some new innovative practices for Stress Reduction activities like Fun Friday, Team Building, Team Outing, Yoga & Meditation, Social Dance, Burn Out and Healing through Music or any occasion that requires a professional touch to ensure things go just the way you planned.

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