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A HEALTHY WAY TO HANDLE WORK PLACE
STRESS THROUGH MEDITATION

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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 research focuses on practices adopted by organizations to prevent, minimize and to overcome the stress. The study aims at understanding use of, meditation as an antidote to workplace stress.

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. Organisations 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 well being 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 research focuses on use of Yoga, Meditation and soothing humor as stress management techniques for a stress free organization.

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).

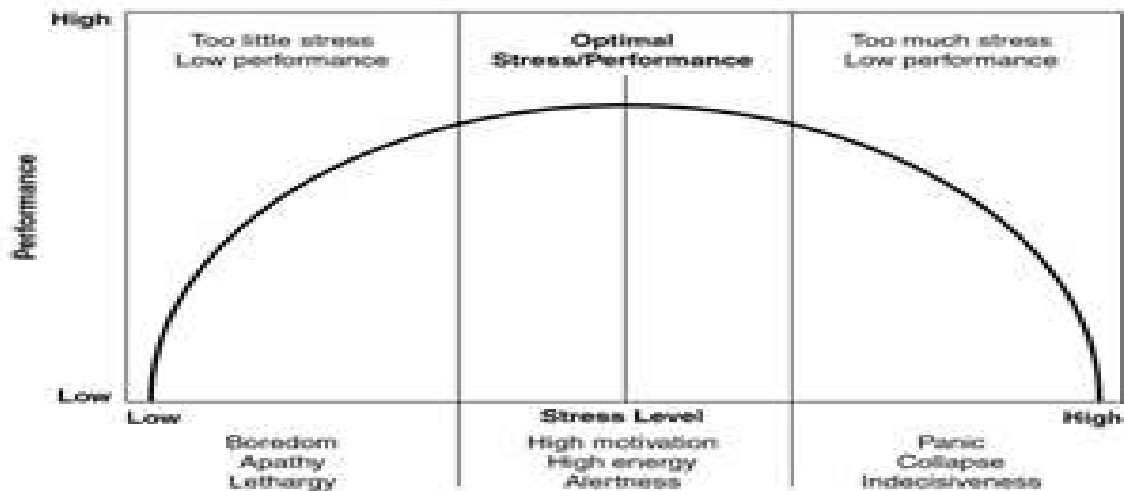


Figure 1: Mind tools (Source: www.mindtools.com)

Stress deteriorates the performance of employee which results in low turnover rates of the company. Stressors, the causes of stress, include any environmental conditions that place a physical or emotional demand on a person. Basically there are four main types of work-related stressors: interpersonal, role-related, task control, and organizational and physical environment stressors.

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 stress management technique Meditation to minimize the stress level of employees. The study is basically based on secondary data. For this purpose various books, Magazines, Journals, Newspapers, various websites of internet were referred.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

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

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, organisations 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 employee's 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 organisational oriented approach.

INDIVIDUAL ORIENTED STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS

1. Solo-Active- Reading, Writing, Photography, Art, Playing a musical instrument, Collection of different things, Running, Hobbies, Vacations.
2. Group- Activities: - Sports, Games, .Eating out., Vacations.
3. Solo-Passive/Group-Passive: - Television, Movies, Shows & Theatre, Listening to music, Concepts, opera, Sporting events, Vacations.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL ORIENTED STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS

The corporate body has also a moral responsibility to practice healthy work culture and environment. The employee during most of the productive period of the day i.e. eight hours of his awoken period of the day, is available in the work place of the company. Each corporate policy makers must analyze their environment; evaluate alternative contingency strategies for likely future scenario like one that is being discussed in this present research. The present study focuses on Yoga, Meditation and Humor which can be the best antidote for the workplace stress.

MEDITATION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO 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.

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.

An experiment on stress reduction using the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique and Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) was conducted at a South African firm with 80 employees (Broome et al, 2005). They also showed that meditators maintained this equilibrium under stress more effectively than non- meditators.

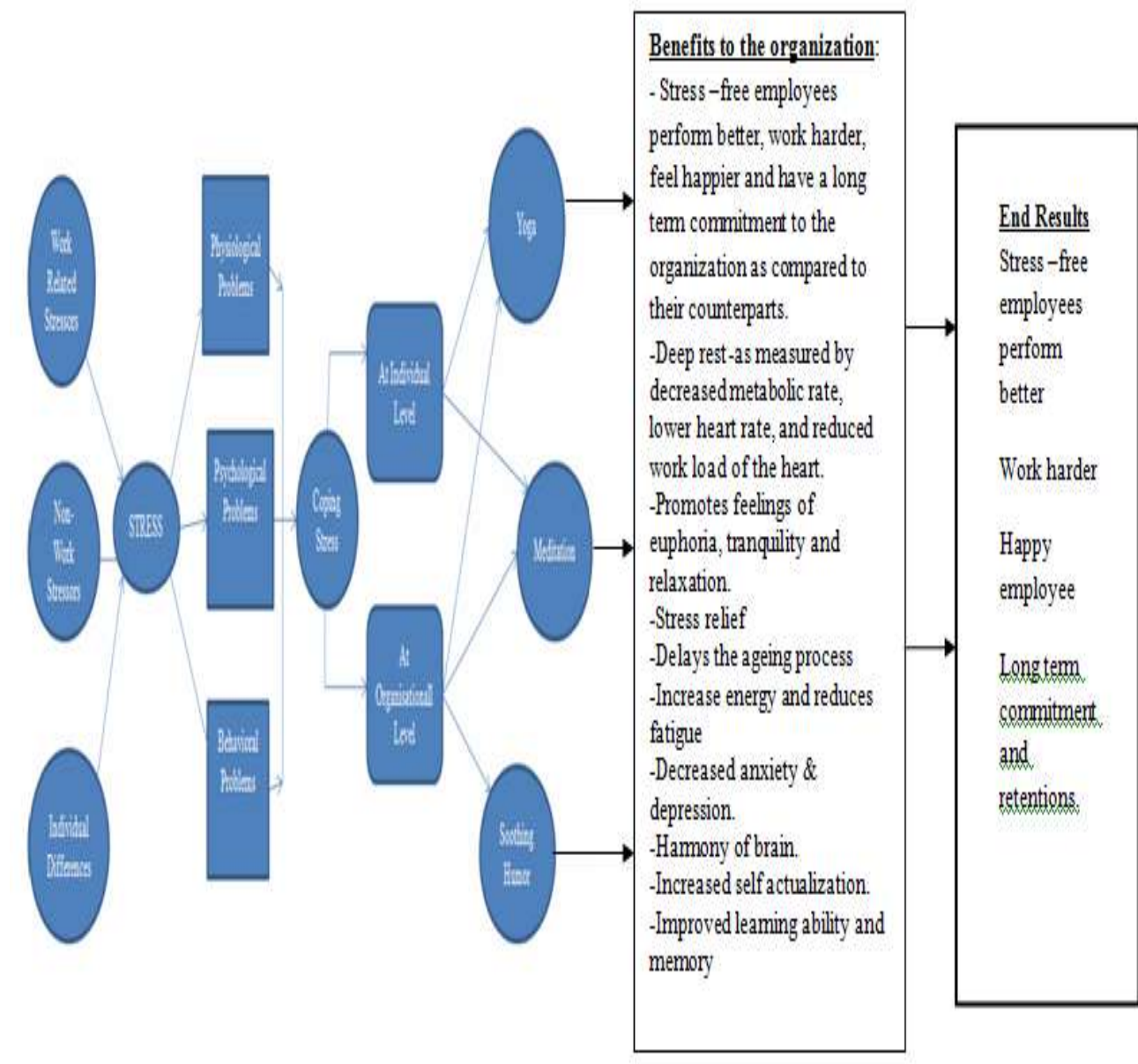
The art of meditation has made its way into the corporate environment and is one of the best ways to reduce stress in the workplace. Companies like IBM Corp., Medtronic Inc., Surface Logix Inc., and Shuster Laboratories Inc. are offering meditation programs on-site to their employees to help them reduce 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 is president of MedWorks 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).

Dr. Gaurav Bissa, Dr. Amit Sharmain²⁶ in their paper talks about managing stress as per Meditation. The idea behind meditation is to consciously relax your body and focus your thoughts on one thing for a sustained period. This occupies your mind, diverting it from the problems that are causing you stress and gives your body a time to relax and recuperate, and to clear away stress hormones. Meditation is a useful and practical relaxation technique. According to Harvard Cardiologist Herbert Benson (1984), a concentrative-style of meditation (e.g., transcendental meditation) promotes the relaxation response, wherein the mind becomes quiet and focused. Based on his clinical relaxation research, he contends that breathing is an important component of the relaxation response. Author reports that certain meditation styles induce a host of 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). It is hoped that this knowledge will motivate organizations to explore the stressors that are present in their own work environments, and to take steps to reduce and/or prevent stress in the workplace, thereby working to maintain the health and wellbeing of employees.

GENERAL MODEL OF STRESS FROM THE STUDY



CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The growing importance of interventional strategies is felt more at organizational level. This particular research was intended to study the importance OF meditation 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 longterm commitment to the organization as compared to their counterparts. It can be concluded from the present research work that there is a positive and significant relationship between stress and Meditation. 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.

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, and Healing through Music, Themed Events, Annual Days Festival Celebration Award Ceremonies, Important Corporate Events, Annual Days, or any occasion that requires a professional touch to ensure things go just the way you planned.

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