

Full Length Research Paper

Stress management through 'yoga practices' in the corporate sector

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In today's era of globalization where there is a lot of competition, innovation and change executives in all organizations cannot avoid tension, stress and anxiety in their day-to-day work. Only hardworking, disciplined, punctual and mentally alert executives can survive the work pressures and strike a balance between work life and personal life. They are exposed to stress and tension for long periods which may manifest in the form of many ailments like hypertension, high/low blood pressure, insomnia, depression, backaches, migraine, spondylitis, etc. This in turn results in overall decrease in the executive's efficiency and productivity; consequently, there is a deterioration of human capital in the organization. Yoga is the answer for healing stress among working men and women. This all-in-one formula acts as a soothing agent for the burned-out Indian corporate and is fast growing on the popularity charts. It serves as reviver of mind, body and soul. The techniques of yoga comprise of physical postures (*asanas*), breath expansion and enhancement (*pranayama*), relaxation and meditation techniques (*dhyaan*), coupled with philosophy of simple and natural lifestyle management. It enhances energy of the person and develops a positive attitude. It has been attested by many as a complete all-in-one holistic formula for stress management. Thus, realizing the impact in many organizations when regular session of yoga is conducted, according to their employees' requirements. In this paper the researcher has tried to analyze how yoga practices help to overcome stress among the ITC executives resulting in a positive impact on the organization.

Key words: Yoga, stress, anxiety, discipline, punctuality.

INTRODUCTION

The word 'stress' is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as, "a state of affair involving demand on physical or mental energy". A condition or circumstance (not always adverse), which can disturb the normal physiological and psychological functioning of an individual. In medical parlance, stress is defined as a perturbation of the body's homeostasis. This demand on mind-body occurs when it tries to cope with incessant changes in life.

A stress condition seems relative in nature. According

to psychologists extremely stressful conditions, are detrimental to human health on the other hand, in moderation stress is normal and in many cases, proves useful. Stress, nonetheless, is synonymous with negative conditions. Today with the rapid diversification of human activity, we come face to face with numerous causes of stress and the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

A few more definitions of stress shall help us to understand it better. According to Richard Lazarus, 'Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources of the individual.' Robert Samuelson defines it as, 'A state of extreme difficulty, pressure, or

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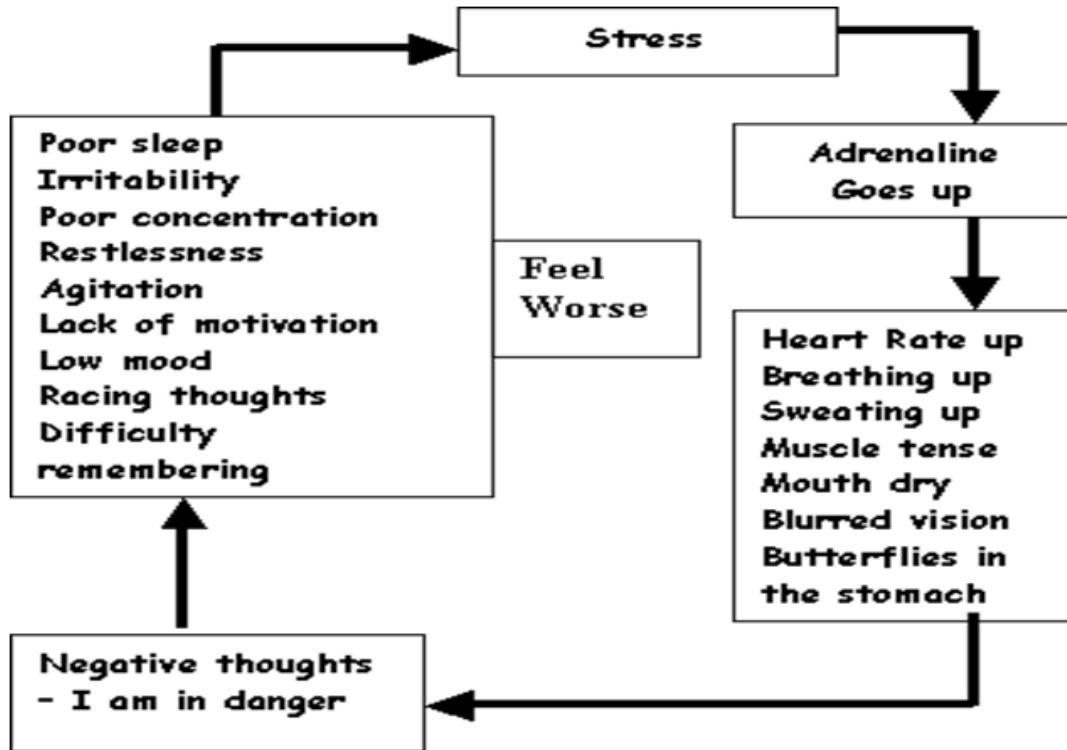


Figure 1. The stress cycle.

strain.'

Objectives of the study

- (1) To study the reasons behind stress in corporate sector.
- (2) To analyze how stress affects their health, relationships, works and family.
- (3) To analyze how yoga helps in handling stress and enhancing performance (Figure 1).

How does stress affect the body?

There are lots of researches that tell us what happens when people experience stressful events, like having a heart problem. When we are in danger or under stress our bodies automatically produces chemicals to help us to cope up with the emergency. The chemical that we produce is called Adrenaline. When there is extra adrenaline in the body, it can cause other symptoms of stress. These can include: poor sleep, irritability, poor concentration, restlessness, feeling like nobody is bothered about oneself, low mood, racing thoughts, difficulty in remembering things.

So stress management is the need of the hour. However, hard we try to go beyond the stress situation;

life seems to find new ways of stressing us out and plaguing us with anxiety attacks. Moreover, be it anxiety, mind-body exhaustion or our erring attitudes, we tend to overlook causes of stress and the conditions triggered by them. In such unsettling moments we often forget that stressors, if not escapable, are fairly manageable and treatable.

Stress, either quick or constant, can induce risky body-mind disorders. Immediate disorders such as dizzy spells, anxiety attacks, tension, sleeplessness, nervousness and muscle cramps can all result in chronic health problems. They may also affect our immune, cardiovascular and nervous systems and lead individuals to habitual addictions, which are inter-linked with stress.

Like 'stress reactions', 'relaxation responses' and stress management techniques are some of the body's important built-in response systems. As a relaxation response, the body tries to gain balance in its homeostasis. Some hormones released during the 'fight or flight' situation prompt the body to replace the lost carbohydrates and fats, and restore the energy level. The knotted nerves, tightened muscles and an exhausted mind crave for relaxation. Unfortunately, today, we do not get relaxing and soothing situations without asking. To be relaxed we have to strive to create such situations. Managing stress is very important for health. If you can practice the stress management, reduction and relief techniques, you can get rid of stress.

In Sanskrit the term 'Yoga' is derived from the two roots one is 'Yujir' which means to join, to combine. So yoga is meant for union where the body, senses, organs of action, unite with the mind and mind unites with the intelligence, intelligence with the consciousness; consciousness with the soul. The second root is 'Yuj Samadhau' means yoga is Samadhi. When you reach a higher level of consciousness, the consciousness transcends its own boundaries, almost reaching to the regime of the soul. There remains parity between the consciousness and the soul. When the disparity vanishes, 'Samadhi' happens.

Yoga is a school of thought that constitutes the perennial wisdom of India. The Yogic culture is evident in all aspects of life in India, be it food, dress styles, postures, activities, habits and attitudes. It is expressed in all art forms such as music, dance and sculpture. All through the years, it has remained as one of the most important facets of Indian Culture, remaining vibrant and responsive to the changing times all through this period. As it developed in India, it came to be associated with the development of Hinduism and its philosophy. Yet in its essence it has always remained away from any religious doctrines or dogmas and never demanded acceptance of any specific belief system. It has always remained as a pathway to realization of truth, open for all the people professing different faiths belonging to different religions and different races. In essence, it is a path of spiritual enquiry, awakened by the earnest desire for having a deeper understanding of life and the entire phenomenon associated with it.

The literal meaning of the word Yoga in Sanskrit is integration. In this sense, Yoga represents a process through which one can learn how to live in the most integrated way. It involves therefore the process of identification and then elimination of all that would contribute to disintegration. It teaches one to integrate the body, mind and soul in oneself. It further goes on to teach integration of individual goals and objectives with the social and organizational goals. It is also a way of life that integrates the phenomenal with the transcendental, the individual soul with the Divine. When taken in this sense it becomes a continuous process, requiring constant vigilance and involving all the aspects of life.

Maia (2004) in his paper had concluded in-depth interviews, which were conducted with 79 people who have founded or lead organizations where contemplative practices play a key role. In a number of interviews, contemplative practices were introduced into the workplace not only as ancillary stress-reduction techniques for individuals, but as a core part of the organization's structure. As interviewees described how their organizations function, a number of characteristics pointed toward "the contemplative organization" as an emerging model of an organization that infuses a contemplative approach into the work place. Interviewees also reported the impact of contemplative practice in the

workplace, including improved communication and a greater sense of team and community.

Rees (1997) explains why managerial stress is likely to be on the increase. The increased attention to managerial stress, for example attempts to measure stress and relaxation techniques. Rees (1997) explains the technique of 'role set analysis' as a means of stress reduction by 'load management'. Individual management skills also need assessing as lack of these can cause or exacerbate managerial 'overload.'

Dennis (2005) paper defines constructs of pure spirituality, applied spirituality and spiritual development. In this study, we surveyed the research methods used for exploring spirituality in organizations. We consider five indications of spirituality – health, happiness, wisdom, success, and fulfillment – and identify research instruments for each based on measures used in prior studies of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation program. Research is seen as valuable for assessing the practical applications of spirituality for the individual, organization, and society (Vojko, 2005).

The purpose of this paper is to present: (1) the problem of stress employees might encounter; (2) the individual inclination to stress; (3) the individual methods for reducing stress; (4) and the authors' model of training for stress prevention.

This model could be customized to the specific needs of small, medium and large organizations. It emerges that individuals vary considerably in their ability to manage stress. Self-perception, locus of control, type A or B behavioral patterns and flexibility or rigidity, all appear to influence stress management abilities.

According to Sonja (2004) managers can be trained to identify the beginnings of mental stress among their workers. This is according to the 'Managing stress' reported by Sydney University's ACIRRT.

The report says that mental stress is the number one workplace injury and disease in terms of lost production. It warns managers that stress issues must be addressed if they do not want to face workers' compensation claims. The report includes six case studies, which illustrate managerial intervention in stress problems.

Chitra (2007) explains the biggest occupational hazard at most workplaces today is stress. After surveying 81 companies, a recent study by Alka et al. 2007 of the New Delhi-based research group, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), says that if corrective action is not taken quickly, the losses from occupational stress-induced diseases could total a staggering \$200 billion (approx. Rs 7,800 trillion) in the next 10 years. The ICRIER study especially points to India's outsourcing industry, where maximum incidents of work-related stress are being reported.

Marek (2003) says that it is true that the advent of technological evolution has proved to be a boon for the corporate sector. But, it has also given rise to stress related problems in workplace. Most working class people

today are experiencing stressful days in life. As a result, the de-stressing programs and methods have got a boost. There are many people who are turning towards the de-stressing programs to get that much-awaited relief. The paper throws light on the de-stressing methods being adopted by companies to overcome stress.

Bahru's (2003) work says that the workplace holds a plethora of anxiety-producers. Many are from unpredictable sources such as sudden job losses, relocations, losing co-workers to downsizing or having multiple bosses in quick succession. The article states that to reduce stress brought by such changes, employees need to assess their skills periodically, learn new ones, participate in professional or trade associations and stay current on industry trends. One cannot eliminate stress, but there are ways to manage it.

Marmot (2004) concluded in his research that conflict between home and work explains the effect of multiple roles on mental health. Single fathers in all three cohorts and of single mothers in the Helsinki cohort had poor mental health and this was partly explained by their higher levels family-to-work conflict. Both types of conflict affect the mental health of men and women independently of each other. Japanese women had the greatest conflict and poorest mental health while Helsinki women had the lowest conflict and best mental health.

The aim of Mijoc's (2009) study was to identify the symptoms of stress in the studied sample, and to establish gender differences in stress symptoms. First, Mijoc's (2009) tried to find out if there are gender differences in the stress level at work, secondly, if there are gender differences in terms of stress symptoms frequency, and finally, if there are gender differences in terms of the intensity of experiencing stress symptoms. In this study, 85 managers from Slovene companies of random choice participated. The results of the study have shown that there are gender differences in terms of all the aforementioned factors, namely a statistically higher level of stress in women. In terms of stress symptoms occurrence, there are gender differences in some stress symptoms as well as in the intensity of experiencing stress symptoms.

Chesler (2010) said that there is substantial evidence showing that it is not uncommon for workers to face unfriendly relationships, poor organizational climate, and aggressive bosses, among other things, in their work settings. However, there are many modes to deal with that such as self-help readings, relaxation exercises, yoga, mental cure therapies, psychological counsel, and so on. Nonetheless, this paper focuses on prayer and its effects through a phenomenological study. The results indicate that the sample members usually pray every day and/or many times during the day. The findings show that the average time that is spent on praying varies.

Further, prayer is also seen as a form of communication with a divine power and it is also regarded as beneficial - broadly speaking - to deal with tasks, colleagues'

relationships, negative emotions and spiritual vibrations at work settings, among other things.

RESEARCH DESIGN

An exploratory research design was used which emphasized on the discovery of new ideas or developing new insights.

Data collection techniques

Primary data

It was collected through questionnaire (personally administered) by field survey. The questionnaire consisted of 10 closed ended questions and two open ended question. Closed ended questions were taken to reduce the variability and subjectivity and to facilitate tabulation and interpretation.

Sampling technique

Sampling is the process of obtaining information about an entire population.

Sampling: ITC SIDCUL*, Haridwar

Sampling Unit: Employees (Executives and Managers)

Sample size: 27 Employees.

Universe size: 35 Employees.

Sampling method

In the aforementioned study random sampling was used in which each and every member of the population is given an equal chance of being selected.

Table 1 shows that maximum percentage of employees, 44% strongly agree that yoga helps corporate sector to deal with stress. Yoga is the answer for healing stress among working men and women.

This all-in-one formula is not only acting as a soothing agent for the burned-out Indian corporate but is fast growing on the popularity. The techniques of yoga comprise physical postures (*asanas*), breath expansion and enhancement (*pranayama*), relaxation techniques, meditation, lifestyle management and philosophies to live a positive life.

The maximum percentage of employees 48% disagree that yoga helps in solving the basic problems at work place as because basic problem might relate to their personnel life which could not be solved through yoga (Table 2).

Yoga is a complete rejuvenation of mind, body and soul. Table 3 shows that maximum percentage of employees 44% agree that yoga helps in unraveling the hidden dimensions of human potential. As one regularly practices yoga, the person becomes mentally, physically fit and alert, his thought process is activated and consequently he becomes innovative and works with a positive frame of mind.

Table 4 shows that maximum percentage of employees 44% agree that yoga helps in personality development. Yoga gradually removes the faults of mind, body and soul. It makes him disciplined and develops a positive attitude in life. It keeps people healthy and controls negative thoughts. Thus with the help of yoga regularly it can enhance ones personality. Yoga is gaining acceptance as an effective tool, for controlling stress which can well be the beginning of a health revolution and leads to personality development.

Table 1. Yoga helped the employees of the corporate sector to deal with stress.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 12 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Percentage | 44 | 44 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

Table 2. Yoga helps in solving the basic problems at work place.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 1 | 8 | 4 | 13 | 1 |
| Percentage | 4 | 29 | 15 | 48 | 4 |

Table 3. Yoga helps in unraveling the hidden dimensions of human potential.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 13 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Percentage | 48 | 44 | 4 | 4 | 0 |

Table 4. Yoga helps in personality development.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 11 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Percentage | 41 | 44 | 7 | 4 | 4 |

Table 5. Yoga therapy helps for ailments.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 15 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Percentage | 56 | 33 | 7 | 4 | 0 |

Table 5 shows that maximum percentage of employees 56% strongly agree that Yoga therapy helps for curing several kinds of ailments related to posture and psycho-somatic disorders. A lot of yoga therapy comprises of physical postures (*asanas*), breath expansion and enhancement (*pranayama*), relaxation techniques, and meditation techniques. This develops the mental strength of the person.

The Table 6 shows that the maximum percentage of employees, 59% strongly agree that yoga must be a part of every corporate sector to overcome stress as because unlike other exercise routines yoga is low impact, improves strength and flexibility, builds concentration, and reduces mental and physical stress and tension. Table 7 shows that maximum percentage of employees 33% can't say that Yoga helps in determining the weakness of people working in corporate sector as because yoga is known to eradicate fatigue and generate energy, all of which lead to increased productivity and morale - perfection for the corporate environment but not determining the weakness of employees working in corporate sector.

Table 8 shows that maximum percentage of employees 63% strongly agree that Yoga is beneficial for performance enhancement in corporate sector as high levels of stress due to extreme pressure give rise to sleep disorders, digestive, eyesight and spinal problems. Thus, yoga offers flexible options which will energize the staff, increase their efficiency and help them overcome the stress and fatigue (Table 9).

The maximum percentage of employees 48% agree that Yoga acts as a motivator and improves the work efficiency of people working in corporate sector. It comprises of simple asana (poses) and breathing techniques, which if practiced properly can yield wonderful and fast results it will energize the staff, increase their efficiency and help them overcome the stress and can also prove beneficial for performance enhancement which could help them to concentrate better.

Table 10 shows that maximum percentage of employees 48% strongly agree that yoga can affect human relationships, and help to cope up with striking balance between work and family, because relaxation techniques like yoga activate a state of

Table 6. Yoga must be a part of every corporate sector to overcome stress.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 16 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage | 59 | 41 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 7. Yoga helps in determining the weakness of people working in corporate sector.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 3 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 1 |
| Percentage | 11 | 30 | 33 | 22 | 4 |

Table 8. Yoga is beneficial for performance enhancement in corporate sector.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 8 | 15 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Percentage | 30 | 55 | 7 | 7 | 0 |

Table 9. Yoga act as motivator and helps in improving the work efficiency of people working in corporate sector.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 9 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Percentage | 33 | 48 | 8 | 7 | 4 |

Table 10. Yoga can affect the human relationship, work and family.

| Scale | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|------------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Frequency | 13 | 10 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Percentage | 48 | 37 | 8 | 7 | 0 |

restfulness that is opposite of stress response. It also increases the ability to stay calm and keep free from all kinds of pressure.

The causes of stress specified by the respondents were:

- (1) Staff inefficiency and staff not dedicated to work
- (2) Work flow deficiency
- (3) Self indiscipline
- (4) Relationship problems
- (5) Workload
- (6) Demanding deadlines
- (7) Extending working hours
- (8) Imbalance in work and family life leads to stress
- (9) No recognition on reward of a good performance
- (10) Lack of clear job description
- (11) Individual personality factors
- (12) Presence of physical illness
- (13) Faulty time management
- (14) Inadequate rest
- (15) Inadequate exercises
- (16) Faulty lifestyle/ inadequate leisure time

(17) Inadequate coping skills

(18) Faulty dietary habits

When asked how yoga was found to be beneficial for performance enhancement in corporate sector the respondents said that, yoga is beneficial for performance enhancement in corporate sector as high levels of stress due to extreme pressure give rise to sleep disorders, digestive, eyesight and spinal problems. Thus, yoga offers flexible options which will energize the staff, increase their efficiency and help them overcome the stress and fatigue. Or we can say relaxation techniques like yoga activate a state of restfulness that is, opposite of stress response. It helps to concentrate better and lead a richer work and family life and helps to improve human relationships.

Limitations of the study

- (1) Candidates did not have sufficient time to fill the questionnaire because of work pressure.
- (2) The questionnaire was distributed amongst 35 operative

executives out of these 27 were received as fully filled due to non respondent error.

(3) The survey was limited to ITC SIDCUL*, Haridwar Unit and it cannot be a true indicator for the whole organization.

The major findings

The major findings after the data analysis are as follows:

(1) In ITC maximum number of employees agrees that yoga helps, corporate sector to deal with stress as because yoga is the answer for healing stress among working men and women.

(2) Employees also agree that yoga acts as motivator and improves work efficiency of people working in corporate sector as because yoga offers flexible options which will energise the staff, increase their efficiency and help them overcome the stress and also beneficial for performance enhancement which could help them to concentrate better.

(3) In ITC maximum number of employees could not say that yoga helps in determining the weakness of people working in corporate sector as because yoga is known to eradicate fatigue and generate energy, all of which lead to increased productivity and morale - perfection for the corporate environment but not determining the weakness of employees working in corporate sector.

(4) One drawback in ITC is that maximum number of employees disagree that yoga helps in solving the basic problems at work place as because basic problem might relate to their personnel life which could not be solved through yoga.

(5) Employees also agree that yoga must be a part of every corporate sector to overcome stress as because unlike other exercise routines yoga is low impact, improves strength and flexibility, builds concentration and reduces mental and physical stress and tension.

(6) Some times stress also has a negative impact on the performance of employees, the employee is demotivated.

(7) Employees also require time to improve their performance as they do not have enough time to attend yoga session because of the work.

Conclusion

Thus, after the analysis it was concluded that yoga is a very important therapy in coping up stress. As yoga is the answer for healing stress among working men and women. This all-in-one formula that is acting as a soothing agent for the burned-out Indian corporate and is only growing on the popularity.

Yoga means different things to different people because it encompasses various aspects that affect an individual's life. The techniques of yoga comprise physical postures (*asanas*), breath expansion and enhancement (*pranayama*), relaxation techniques, meditation, lifestyle management and philosophies to live a positive life and

which if practiced properly can yield wonderful and fast results.

ITC invests time and resources in a company-based wellness culture, with the focus on 'maintenance' rather than 'repair', can expect major returns on investment. Upbeat, energetic employees result in a healthy, relaxed environment with less absenteeism. De-stressed, healthy, happy, focused and alert employees have a higher productivity than those which are stressed out, fighting fatigue and have body pain. It is not necessary to keep the yoga session long, it can be customized as per requirement. Even 15 min rapid session can yield good results, there is no need to dedicated separate session, Yoga can be done while sitting on the chair or standing in the desk space area. Thus, we can say as the industrial jobs are becoming more challenging and demanding, stress is a burning issue in every organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations to enhance performance inspite of the stress of the employees are as follows:

(1) Conduct seminars and presentations: The major problem is that the employees are not aware of the benefits of yoga as because unlike other exercise routines yoga is low impact, improves strength and flexibility, builds concentration, and reduces mental and physical stress and tension. So seminars and presentations should be conducted to generate awareness among the employees.

(2) Open door policy: There should be face to face communication between yoga instructor and employees so that the employees can express their views freely about stress and hence practicing of yoga will become more effective.

(3) Feedback system: The organization should look forward to have a yoga session which includes the feedback of employer and employees to make it effective.

(4) Periodical review of stress management techniques and needs: Management should periodically review whether there are any stress management needs for employees or not, this will enhance their performance

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