



THE ROLE OF YOGA IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Human resources management is a part and parcel of every sector which is the process of managing people in a structured manner with a focus on developing a work force which can effectively help the organisation to meet its objectives. In the frenetic world of today where management principles are being turned on their heads there are some principles and precepts which are constant and which can help in the development of human resources in such a way that the health of the organization and the health of the bottom line is safeguarded. In this paper we will see how the techniques and practices of Yoga - a time-tested oriental science - may be helpful.

Keywords: *Yoga • Occupational health • Yoga techniques • Human Resource Development*



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INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management as an academic discipline gained respectability in the early 20th century, when researchers began documenting ways of creating business value through the strategic management of the workforce. The focus is now on strategic initiatives, like talent management and industrial relations and includes concepts like fairness and wellbeing. Raising the productivity of work force remains the main objective of Human Resource Management and the experts in this field are constantly scouring the world of ideas for adoption or adaptation in furtherance of this objective. The focus is on developing a work force which can effectively help the organisation to meet its objectives. There are three fundamental components of human resources development: individual development, career development and organisation development. Of these three the most important is the development of the individual which involves developing individual skills, knowledge and improving the psychosocial work environment.

Stress:

Now, in the twenty first century 'stress' is so ubiquitous that in the first instance it would seem that no definition is required. However, this may be an oversimplified view of a huge problem that has far reaching consequences. Therefore, it is important not only to define

stress but also to look at ways to manage stress. The dictionary definition of stress reads thus- ‘A mentally or emotionally disruptive or disquieting influence or alternatively, a state of tension or distress caused by such an influence.’ According to Seaward , “Stress is the inability to cope with the perceived threat to one’s mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing”. Definitions found in psychological books also focus on the adverse effect of stress on the physical and mental body. Girdano *et al.* are of the view that stress is a psycho-physiological arousal that can fatigue the body system to the point of malfunction and disease.

Stress at the work place

Occupational stress is the widespread phenomenon and is contributory factor absenteeism, physical and psychological illness and lowered productivity. The families and work institute revealed high levels of stress at the work place. Nearly A subsequence 2000 Integra survey also reported that nearly 65% of workers said that workplace stress had cause difficulties. The survey also revealed that stress caused health related problems. 62% of the workers had work related neck pain, 44% reported stress in eye, 38% complained of hurting hands and 34% reported difficulty in sleeping because of stress.

Management of Stress

The state of stress is not fixed. It remains in a continuous state of flux in which the cognitive, behavioural and physiological processes interact. However, it is possible to aggregate information and come to a conclusion about the state of stress. Business is concerned about labour productivity. Productivity is adversely affected by stress which can originate from the work itself or from external factors like financial problems. Management of stress is one of the priorities in human resource management Levels of control over the job entail decision making authority, support from supervisors and colleagues and confidence to get the designated job done.

What is Yoga

Yoga is an ancient science and an eastern perspective on physical and mental health [14]. It is being increasingly recognised as an applied science all over the world In Yoga the body is looked upon as an instrument which enables the individual to evolve and to live and work fruitfully. A correct practice of Yoga is believed to fructify in health or wholeness through the rediscovery of the yoked reality of the experience of the individual of the body and mind. It brings the body and mind together into one harmonious experience. The body, mind and breath are connected to energise and balance the whole system. Routine practice of Yoga brings better health, mental peace and an integration which are precursors to a higher

mental state. Yoga seeks to remove nine obstacles which are familiar to people of all places and in all eras: illness, mental stagnation, doubt, lack of foresight, fatigue, over indulgence, illusions about one's true state of mind, lack of perseverance and regression. With the spread of knowledge of the beneficial effects of Yoga it gained wider acceptance and has also gained respect as a valuable tool for helping in the management of stress and improving health and general wellbeing.

Yoga Techniques for Stress Management

Yoga is probably the most effective way to deal with various disabilities along the same, time honoured lines of treatment that contemporary medicine has just rediscovered and tested. Yogic body postures are probably the best tools to disrupt any learned patterns of wrong muscular efforts. Controlled breathing and withdrawal of mind from the domination of senses are extremely efficient techniques to divert the attention of the individual from the objects of the outer environment, to increase every person's energy potential and 'interiorize' them, to achieve control of one's inner functioning.

Body Postures

The aim of the practice of body postures is to reduce the activity and inertia in the mind and reinforce clarity. In other words, body postures increase mental calm, clarity, steadiness and alertness. Finding the natural link between breath and movement is simple: on exhalation the body is contracted and on inhalation it is expanded. There are however some exceptions. There are two ways of practicing a body posture. The dynamic practice repeats the movement into the posture and out again in rhythm with the breath, whereas in static practice the posture is held for a certain number of breathe cycles. The process involves moving into and out of that position with controlled breathing. The work place as also many sporting activities contributes to structural imbalance in the body. Body postures are useful in correcting structural imbalances by using movements to work on each side of the body separately. With appropriate breathing and appropriate movement these postures can be used to maintain the strength and flexibility of the spine. The postures must have the dual qualities of alertness and relaxation.

Controlled Breathing

Birthing is a normal process of life, yet because of incorrect breathing practice sufficient blood does not reach the lungs, brains and other tissues. Under the state of stress, many people further restrict their breathing thereby increasing fatigue, muscular tension, irritability and anxiety stressed and tense individuals are often recommended to change the way they breathe as shallow breathing leads to an anxious state. The yogic technique of

controlled breathing has been found to be an effective tool in the management of stress. It is the conscious, deliberate regulation of breath replacing unconscious patterns of breathing. It involves the regulation of the inhalation, the exhalation and the suspension of the breath. The regulation of these three components is achieved by modulating their length and maintaining this modulation for a period of time, as well as directing the mind into the process. These components of breathing must be long and subtle. Breathing is the one physical function which is both voluntary and involuntary. The breath therefore, can be used to control the autonomous nervous system. In order to understand the science of controlled breathing it is necessary to consider the nature and function of the nervous system, for this system coordinates the functions of all the other systems in the body. It is subdivided into the central and the autonomic nervous systems. The central nervous system consists of the brain, twelve pairs of cranial nerves, the spinal cord and thirty one pairs of spinal nerves. The cranial and spinal nerves spread throughout the body, forming a network of nerve fibres. The automatic nervous system is subdivided into the sympathetic and para-sympathetic systems. These two systems work in harmonious regulation.

Meditation

Yoga has two traditional complementary meanings. The first is to 'bring two things together' and the second meaning is to 'converge the mind'. The Yoga tradition places great importance on the mind as it believes that the mind is the cause of bondage and liberation of humans. Yoga is the cessation of the whirling thoughts in the mind. According to yoga the mind has a significant role to play in all disorders. A disturbed mind lowers the immunity of the body and makes it vulnerable to diseases. Every psycho-physiological disturbance, every negative emotion, apart from causing distress also interferes with the rhythm of muscles. This disturbance not only affects the skeletal musculature but the body as a whole thereby changing the entire postural substrate of the person. This along with disturbance in glandular secretions makes the body more prone to infections and disorders. Yoga prescribes various methods to quieten an agitated, restless mind. Persistent practice and detachment from cravings is suggested. Yoga also advises an attitudinal change to purify the mind. Changing dysfunctional habits and thoughts is largely a matter of mind. The prescription is to develop an attitude of friendliness, compassion, joyfulness and equanimity. Yoga shows ways of understanding the functioning of the mind and helps to quieten the movements leading to mastery over the mind and the emotions [24]. It is interesting to note that the ways and means to achieve a balance described by Yoga are similar to the 'Rational Emotional Therapy' described in modern psychology. Yoga is a contemplative tradition. Consciousness and

attention are actively cultivated in Yoga as shown in Table 1 are employed for meditation. Besides the spiritual benefits of meditation, there are a wide range of physical and psychological benefits which are manifested through the practice of meditation. Reduction in levels of stress is one such benefit.

Mindfulness Meditation Based Stress Reduction:

Mindfulness is inherently a state of consciousness. Although awareness of and attention to present events and experiences are present in all individuals, there could be a wide variation in the quality. Mindfulness is usually defined as the state of being attentive and aware of what is happening at the present moment. According to Thera, "mindfulness is clear and single minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception". Hanh [26] has a similar definition of mindfulness-"keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality". Therefore, an individual can, at any given moment, be conscious of thoughts, motives, emotions as well as sensory and perception stimuli. Consciousness encompasses both attention and awareness. Awareness provides a background to consciousness where inner and outer environment is continuously monitored.. But what actually happens is that awareness and attention are intertwined and there is a constant interplay between the two. Although attention and awareness are relatively constant features of the normal functioning of an individual, mindfulness leads to focused attention to and awareness of the reality of the moment or the experience of the event taking place at the moment.

Time Management:

Studies suggest that the practice of yoga increases awareness and mindfulness. This is helpful for managing time which is recognized as a significant 'stressor' at the work place. Bad time management leads to build up of stress. Symptoms of inappropriate time management include: rushing, fatigue or listlessness with many slack hours of non-productive activity, vacillation between unpleasant alternatives, chronic missing of deadlines, insufficient time for interpersonal relationships and the sense of being overwhelmed by demands and details. Most methods of time management include three steps: establishing priorities, eliminating low priority jobs and learning to make decisions. Effective time management has been found to minimise stress, anxiety and job fatigue .

Food and Yoga:

According to yogic science, the food that nourishes brings harmony of body and mind, provides energy for clarity in thought and action and the food that consumes brings disease and illness. Yoga practices have been used as an experiential adjunct to other forms of

therapy in the treatment of eating disorders. The study found Yoga useful in increasing self-awareness, reflection and the ability to self soothe thereby mitigating the desire to use food to fill an emotional void created by stress. Studies have found that high levels of cortisol are related to stress and that these high levels of cortisol stimulate feelings of hunger. Stressed emotional eaters ate more sweet high fat foods and a more energy dense meal than unstressed eaters.. Research has shown that some foods actually induce a state of stress. Excess amounts of sugar, caffeine, salt and foods poor in vitamins and minerals weaken the resistance of the body to the stress response and may make a person more vulnerable to disease and illness.

Conclusion

Yoga - an ancient Indian tradition - has a holistic view of the human being. There is a practical orientation of the psychological aspects of yoga. The theory - practice continuum, the psycho- integrative and experiential matrix of the concepts of yoga lay a fertile ground for the growth of the best techniques in the development and management of human resources. To get the best of yoga it has to be adopted as a technique and tool to manage life and work. Studies have validated the physical and psychological benefits of Yoga.

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