

Healthy Way to Handle Work Place Stress through Yoga, Meditation and Soothing Humor

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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 yoga, meditation and soothing humor by different organizations as an antidote to workplace stress.*

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

I. 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.

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.

II. 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 Bankl

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 2014 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, 2010; Davis, 2004; Dolden & Ward, 2006; Newsham, Veitch, Charles, Clinton, Marquardt, Bradley, Shaw, & Readon, 2014; Vischer, 1989, 1996). The tasks workers perform in modern office buildings are increasingly complex and depend on sophisticated technology

III. 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).

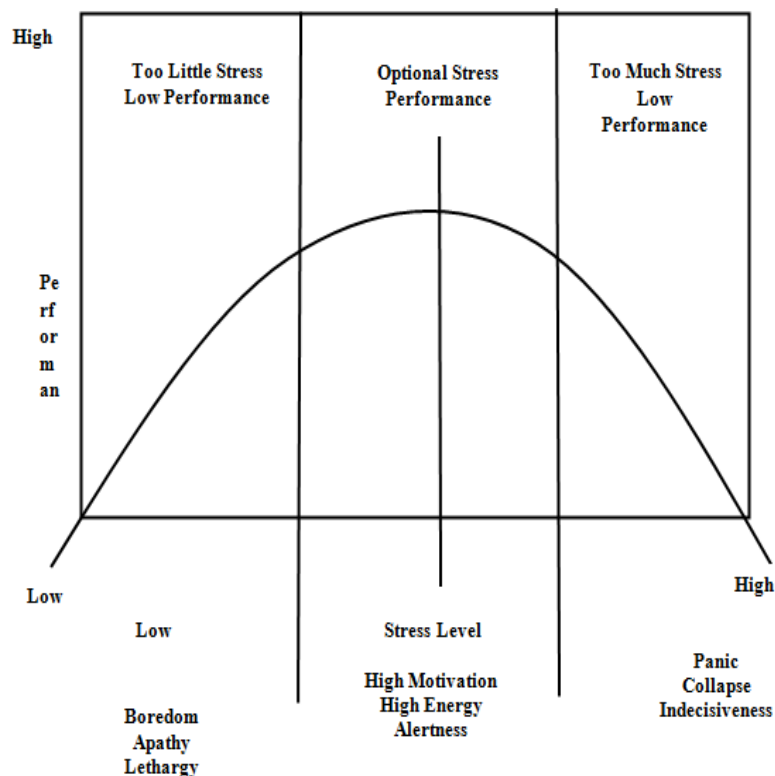


Figure 1: Mind Tools (Source: www.mindtools.com)

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. Yerkes and Dodson (1908) were the first to —stumble upon the Inverted-U relationship between stress and performance their work focused on the effects of stress on the learning response of rats.

Using three trials with low, moderate, and high levels of stimulus, the authors found a weak but curvilinear relationship, with performance on the task improving as the stressor stimulus reached amoderate level and decreasing as stimulus strength increased beyond this point. Selye (1975) and McGrath (1976) also suggest an Inverted-U relationship between stress and performance. 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.

IV. Research Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of the present research is to analyze 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 and Soothing Humor as a tool for interventions to reduce/combat the workplace stress.

4.1 Causes and consequences of workplace stress

S.NO	CAUSES	S T R E S S	S.NO	CONSEQUENCES OF DISTRESS
1	<u>Work related stressors:</u> Inter-personal stressors. Role related stressors. Task control stressors. Organizational- Physical environment stressors.		1	<u>Physiological:</u> Heart diseases. Ulcers. High blood pressure. Headaches. Sleep disturbances. Increased illness.
2	<u>Non-work stressors:</u> Time-based. Strain based. Role based conflict.		2	<u>Psychological:</u> Job Dis-satisfaction. Low commitment. Exhaustion. Depression. Moodiness. Burnout.
3	<u>Individual Differences:</u> Personal health. Knowledge-skill. Coping skills. Resilience work holism.		3	<u>Behavioral:</u> Low job performance. More accidents. Faulty decisions. Higher absenteeism. Workplace aggression. Turnover/Absenteeism.

4.2 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.

4.2.1 Individual oriented strategies for coping with stress

- ❖ **Solo-Active:** - Reading, Writing, Photography, Art, playing a musical instrument, Collection of different things, Running, Hobbies, Vacations.
- ❖ **Group- Activities:** - Sports, Games, Eating out, Vacations.

- ❖ **Solo-Passive/Group-Passive:-**Television, Movies, Shows & Theatre, Listening to music, Concepts, Opera, Sporting events, Vacations.
- ❖ **Yoga & Meditation:** - This paper is focusing on Yoga & meditation and how it is helpful in overcoming the stress

4.2.2 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.

4.3 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. In another study the authors found significant levels of reduction in depression in 25 Indian adults with $P < 0.05$ within 15 days (Mishra, Mand Sinha, R. K., 2001) using an intervention where individuals lived in an ashram environment and participated in ashram activities. But again, the intervention involved, yoga, meditation, rest, prepared meals, plenty of sleep, and journaling. The change in environment might have an impact on the internal validity of the study.

Rudra Bhandari, Bal Krishna 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, Raebrali, 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 Reibel, D. K., J. M. Greeson, G. C. Brainard, and S. Rosenzweig (2001) conducted a study which examined the effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on health-related quality of life and physical and psychological symptomatology in a heterogeneous patient population. Patients participated in an 8-week MBSR program and were required to practice 20 min. of meditation daily. Pre- and post-intervention data were collected and after One-year follow-up revealed maintenance of initial improvements on several outcome parameters. The author concluded that a group mindfulness meditation training program can enhance functional status and well-being and reduce physical symptoms and psychological distress in a heterogeneous patient population and that the intervention may have long-term beneficial effects.

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 (âsanas), 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.

4.4 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 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). Dr. Gaurav Bissa, Dr. Amit Sharma 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.

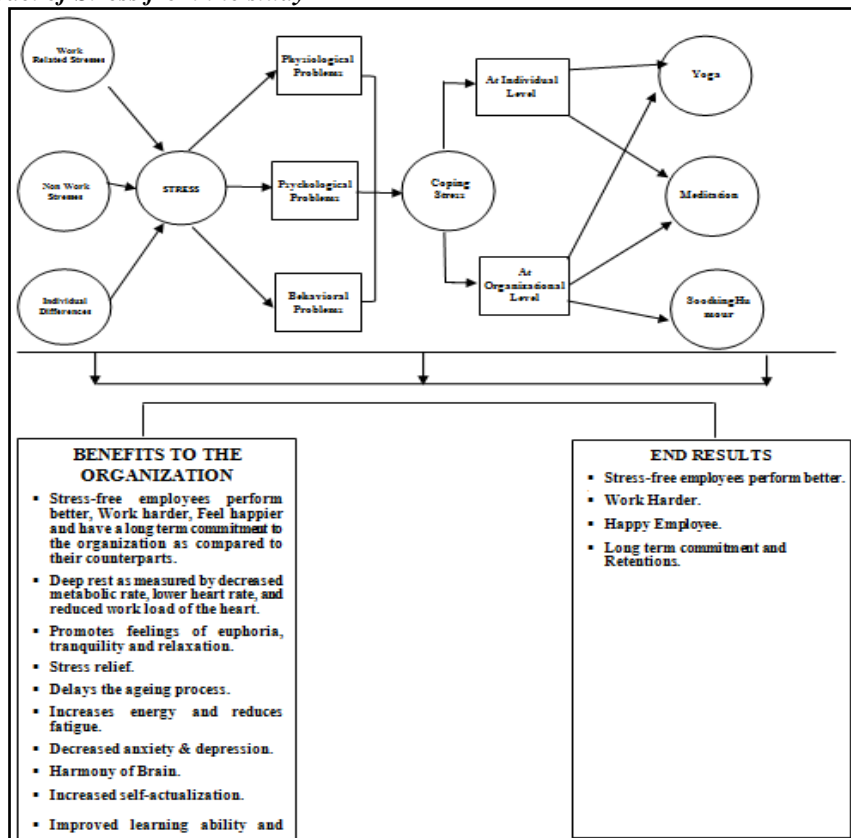
Author reports that certain meditation styles induce a host of biochemical and physical changes in the body, which may be collectively referred to as the "relaxation response" that includes changes in metabolism, heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and brain chemistry. Stress tends to be either 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.

4.5 Soothing humor and its Relevance to Stress Management

A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs --- jolted by every pebble in the road-Henry Ward Beecher, American clergyman 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. In one study, individuals who scored high in humor experienced less stress, responded with optimistic emotions, and had a more positive self-concept (Martin et al. 1993).

In a related study, people with a high sense of humor were likely to reframe stressful situations so that they were perceived as manageable (Abel 2002)³². Millicent H Abel in his study explored relationships between sense of humor, stress, and coping strategies and the results were discussed as supporting the role of humor in restricting a situation so as it is less stressful, and the relationship of humor to both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. Humor promotes openness to new ideas by relaxing people and making them less likely to criticize mistakes or new ideas. This leads to risk taking, which is the basis of creative thinking (Morreall 1991). The lack of sharp criticism leads to a safe environment allowing people to act on creative thinking and implement new ideas more freely).

4.6 General Model of Stress from the study



V. 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 Yoga, meditation and soothing 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 research work 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 research is done in the area of Yoga, Meditation and Soothing humor with an intention to find their positive effect on the employees who were suffering from workplace stress. The strong evidences of the positive effect of Yoga, Meditation and Soothing humor gives this research a clearer approach to these interventions which result in a major reduction of workplace stress. 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.

VI. Limitations and Scope of Further Research

The study concluded that the Yoga, Meditation and Soothing humor acted as a best stress management technique to reduce workplace stress. The different research papers were studied where these tools were used and they resulted in a high productivity and reduction of workplace stress and stress free employees with harmonious environment in the organization. This result of the research is a generalized benefit of all the types of Yoga, Meditation and Soothing humor techniques on workplace stress. And this generalization includes the further scope of research.

There are many other Yogic techniques, Meditation techniques and humor techniques of stress management, where even on any one technique the research can be done. And in today's stress prone environment, these techniques will be highly effective for enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, performance and cultivating right attitude among employees and reducing workplace stress.

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